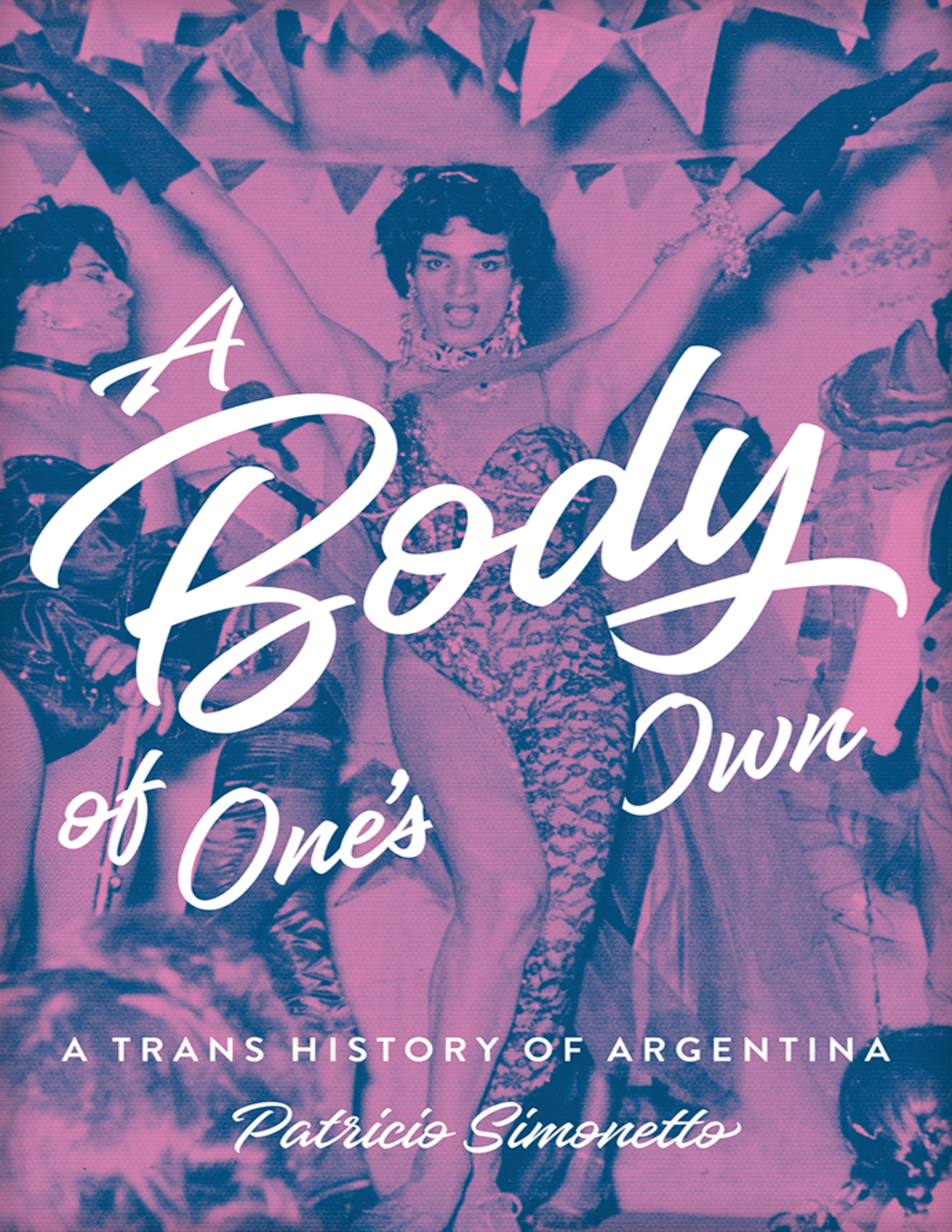




A Body of One's Own

A TRANS HISTORY OF ARGENTINA

Patricio Simonetto

A BODY OF ONE'S OWN
A Trans History of Argentina

PATRICIO SIMONETTO



UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRESS
Austin

Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are the author's.

Copyright © 2024 by the University of Texas Press

All rights reserved

First edition, 2024

Requests for permission to reproduce material from this work should be sent to:

Permissions

University of Texas Press

P.O. Box 7819

Austin, TX 78713-7819

utpress.utexas.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Simonetto, Patricio, author.

Title: A body of one's own : a trans history of Argentina / Patricio Simonetto.

Description: First edition. | Austin : University of Texas Press, 2024. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023010665 (print) | LCCN 2023010666 (ebook)

ISBN 978-1-4773-2860-6 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4773-2861-3 (PDF)

ISBN 978-1-4773-2862-0 (ePub)

Subjects: LCSH: Gender transition—Argentina—History. | Transgender people—Political activity—Argentina—History. | Transgender people—Legal status, laws, etc.—Argentina—History. | Gender identity—Political aspects—Argentina—History. | Gender identity—Law and legislation—Argentina—History. | Transgender people—Argentina—Social conditions—History. | Argentina—Politics and government—History.

Classification: LCC HQ77.95.A7 S566 2024 (print) | LCC HQ77.95.A7 (ebook) | DDC 306.76/80982—dc23/eng/20230313

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023010665>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023010666>

doi:10.7560/328606

Contents

A Note to the Reader

INTRODUCTION. In the Flesh of (National) History

CHAPTER 1. Cut from a Different Cloth: *Gender Transgressions in the Early Twentieth Century*

CHAPTER 2. The Body I Was Born In: *Governing Sex and Embodiment Repertoires during the Era of the Biomedical Transition*

CHAPTER 3. Queens in the Theaters and the Streets: *The Global Making of Travestis' Popular Culture and Everyday Technologies*

CHAPTER 4. Living Laboratories: *Travesti/Trans Knowledge and Homemade Technologies*

CHAPTER 5. The Carnal Revolution: *Trans Citizenship and the Limits of Democratic Transition*

Epilogue

Acknowledgments

Notes

Bibliography

Index

A Note to the Reader

A great number of the newspaper articles and magazines consulted were in the archive of the Sarmiento Press (Diario Crónica) of the National Library Mariano Moreno. Because this archive is organized as cards with clippings taken out of the newspapers, I am able to provide only the dates of the newspapers recorded by journalists.

INTRODUCTION

In the Flesh of (National) History

If anyone wants to examine our homeland, the homeland for which we have sworn to die countless times in school playgrounds, the homeland that has taken the lives of young men and women in wars, the homeland that has buried people in concentration camps, if anyone really wants to investigate all that shit, they'd only have to take a look at Auntie Encarna's body. We're like a country too, in the merciless damage done to the bodies of travestis. The marks left on certain bodies, unfairly, capriciously, avoidably, the mark of hatred. Auntie Encarna was 178 years old. Auntie Encarna had scars of all kinds, ones she did to herself in prison (because it was always better to be in the infirmary than in the thick of the violence) and that she got in the street fights, from vicious johns and ambushes. She even had a scar on her left cheek that lent her a mysterious, ruined air. Her breasts and thighs were permanently bruised from beatings she'd received under arrest, all the way back to the dictatorship (she said that that was when she had first come face-to-face with the evil of man). No apologies, the bruising was from the aircraft oil with which she'd shaped her body, the Italian Mama's body she used to earn the money for food, electricity, gas, and the water that nourished her beautifully lush patio, a patio that was like an extension of the park, just as her body was an extension of the war.

Camila Sosa Villada, *Bad Girls*

Camila Sosa Villada's novel *Las Malas (Bad Girls)* re-creates the life of a group of *travestis* in Córdoba, Argentina, during the 1980s.¹ Published in 2019, the book became a bestseller, was translated into numerous languages—from English to Croatian—and won the prestigious Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz literature award. In her novel Villada placed the beaten body of a travesti mother at the center of the national historical narrative of Argentina. Tía Encarna—Auntie Encarna—refers metaphorically to travestis' embodiment. In Spanish, *encarnar* means to incarnate or embody, which can be read in the novel as a double reference—to travestis' gender and life embodiment *and* to the ways in which the body archives life

experience. *Bad Girls* challenged travestis' marginalization in the Argentine national narrative and highlighted the violence that makes this erasure possible. Tía Encarna's body becomes the body of the nation itself: an archive of the happiness and sorrows of a country.²

This fragment forces us to remember that there is no nation (even as an imagined community) without the bodies that form it.³ The phrase of the author of the first Argentine Constitution (1853), Juan Bautista Alberdi, "To govern is to populate," captures how bodies were central for Argentina's material and symbolic construction. In their struggles to build a modern nation, Argentinian elites publicly debated the desirable population by intersecting ideas about immigration, race, and sexual reproduction.⁴ As a response to the mainstream representation of Argentina as an empty country, they embraced different ideas on how to foster the reproduction of healthy citizens to invigorate the homeland.⁵ During the twentieth century, elites, policy makers, and different social movements struggled to define the corporeal limits of citizenship and nation-belonging.

However, there seemed to emerge a consensus: the reduction of bodies to their genitalia as a symbol of their contribution to the reproductive potency of the nation, an obsession with aligning citizenship, body, genitalia, and gender. Even if these models changed with later extensions of political and civil rights, because of the centrality that the elites provided to sex and reproduction as motors of national development, this model continued to produce precarious conditions for those bodies that were considered undesirable, especially those claiming a gender different from that assigned to them at birth. This book tells the story of how these tumultuous and erratic expansions and contractions were archived and defined in the bodies of those people who were excluded from normative definitions of citizenship.

In an open challenge to this restrictive sexual corset, Latin American trans movements have placed their agenda at the center of political and cultural debates of the twenty-first century. From the struggle for the right to circulate freely in public to the legal

recognition of their gender, trans activists have become visible actors in social mobilizations and politics across the Americas, especially since the 1980s.⁶ In social movements and the arts, a diverse range of manifestations have challenged the exclusionary effects of the legal, cultural, social, and political cisgender order.⁷

This book places the everyday negotiation of body ownership at the core of Argentine history. By creating a narrative of transness, this book challenges national historical storytelling. I show how the experiences of those crossing the frontiers of gender can transform our understanding of Argentine history by, for example, helping us redefine what we call democracy as a lived bodily experience. It demonstrates that the public portrayal of lives considered marginal has been a double-edged sword: a script open to interpretation that boosted sexually and gendered deviant identifications and embodiment, as well as vital mechanisms for defining the bond between citizens and the state, and more broadly, the limits of the social production of sex. It positions the history of those bodies within a significant issue for Latin American nations since independence in the nineteenth century: sovereignty. While scientists, policy makers, or members of the elite attempt to police national bodies to define the limits of national belonging, this book analyzes how these people negotiated and pushed these limits by claiming their right to exist on their own terms. This book shows how the experiences of people crossing gender boundaries were crucial in the consolidation and transformation of sex as an allegedly inflexible dominant value of the Argentine nation- and citizenship-building. In so doing it studies how the hypervisibility of trans bodies in the media legitimated the passing of regulations banning gender-affirmation practices. Likewise, the public portrayal of their lives popularized narratives that changed the general understanding of what sex was and the possible ways of affirming—or defining—a new sex.

By studying trans body portrayal and experimentation as a scenario of the making of nationhood and citizenship—and by interconnecting it with the elites' dreams and nightmares about sex

as the core of national reproduction (and development)—this book contributes to further interrogations about the intersections of race, social class, and sexuality. This book endorses Paulina Alberto's call to interconnect histories of race and sexuality in Argentina, and explores how the public portrayal of people with gender-nonconforming experiences has played a part in the broader histories of whiteness in Argentina.⁸

It is this story that speaks to the present situation. Latin American trans communities continue to face precarious conditions. Recent studies have shown that the life expectancy of trans people ranges from 35.5 to 41.25 years, in contrast to an average in Latin America of 75 years.⁹ By participating in a wide range of demonstrations, such as pride parades or riots against neoliberal politics, trans movements have challenged the violence that has conditioned their lives, as well as traditional assumptions about gender and sexuality.¹⁰

After the bloodiest dictatorship in national history (1976–83), human rights movements and postneoliberal governments (2003–15) consolidated public memory policies as a key political arena for Argentina.¹¹ As I have previously affirmed in my work with Butierrez, in this context, during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, social movements have deployed multiple uses of the past to question the limits of citizenship. During the democratic transition of the 1980s and 1990s, by appropriating the language of human rights, LGBTTTQI+ organizations connected their claims to the legitimated repertoire of the families and victims of the dictatorship to include sexual repression in definitions of political violence exercised by a dictatorial state.¹² After the social and political crisis of 2001 that challenged the legitimacy of the classic neoliberal project, social movements' memory politics initiated a process of institutionalization during the governments of Néstor Kirchner (2003–07) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–14), whose administrations fostered a new state narrative expressed through the promotion of judgment against those involved in the crimes of the dictatorship, as well as multiplying memorials and museums dedicated to the victims.¹³

Even if sexual and political violence continued to create new debates about the nature of dictatorship, the rejection of state violence was performed as the core of political language and played a vital role in the queer reimagination of citizenship as LGBTTTIQ+ movements fought to be recognized as victims.¹⁴ Since the 1980s these movements have pressed for the social recognition of four hundred LGBTTTIQ+ victims of state terror. While this demand was helpful in placing state sexual violence on the human rights agenda, some scholars pointed out that it could simultaneously hide a long history of state violence against sexual dissidence that went beyond dictatorial times.¹⁵ Writers, activists, and politicians who identify as travestis and transsexuals have challenged narratives of the past to highlight how they have been systematically excluded and erased from the definition of citizenship.¹⁶ The travesti scholar Marlene Wayar understands this process of violence as an *identicidio*—an “identity genocide”—in order to demand social reparations for the harm done historically to travestis.¹⁷ Grassroots organizations such as the *Archivo de la Memoria Trans* (Trans Memory Archive) in Argentina mix archival politics and activism by collecting, preserving, and exhibiting personal materials such as photographs and letters, to make themselves visible in the past and to legitimate their claims in the present, with the aim of making new trans futures possible.¹⁸

In this book, *trans* is used as an umbrella concept that includes diverse groups who define themselves as travesti, transsexual, and transgender, and some intersex people. However, depending on the historical context, the book employs various terms in Spanish—such as *travesti*, *mujer operada* (literally, woman who has been operated on), *invertido*, or *marica*—in order to provide an insight into the complex meanings that people gave to their daily corporeal experiences.¹⁹ My use of Spanish highlights the limits of the globalization of trans terminology as a unique common experience, making visible local and regional particularities and the limits of any attempt at universalization. For example, *sexual invert* was a medical and popular concept used during the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries that defined a broad spectrum of people who occasionally or permanently moved from one gender to another. The concept also referred to attraction to people considered to be of the same gender, although this was not always required. *Marica* was a community term that could define both men who had relationships with other men and who had a female gender expression and people with a gender-nonconforming identification. For decades the term coexisted and sometimes was used by travestis as an interchangeable term of self-identification. *Travesti* is a female identity that does not fit into the binary man-woman and is usually used by people who do not seek a genital gender-affirmation surgery. Appropriated from medical and theatrical discourses, travesti became a central social and political identity in the second half of the twentieth century. The concept of transsexuality became popular between the 1960s and the 1990s. In contrast with travestis, transsexuals have usually been associated with gender-affirmation surgeries and have usually defined their experience with a narrative focused on being trapped in the wrong body. Even if they helped people distinguish one from another, these categories were flexible. Though sometimes viewed as interchangeable by journalists, even if travestis and transsexuals belonged to distinctive groups during a lifetime, some of them could change their self-identification from one to another.

A Trans History of Argentine Bodies

A Body of One's Own explores how trans bodies were materialized and understood through time in Argentina from 1900 to 2021. During this period the languages and practices related to trans bodies transformed the legal, medical, and popular conception of "sex." The twentieth and twenty-first centuries were scenes of a fundamental transformation of the notion of sex: from the restrictive concept that understood it as an inflexible nature reduced to genitalia to the recognition of every person's possibility to perceive their own gender. By tracing this history, this book offers a reading of national history through those bodies, from the limits of gender

belonging to the ongoing corporeal experience of citizenship and nation formation.

This study focuses on the experience of “people who moved away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender.”²⁰ I endorse Susan Stryker’s transhistorical use of the term *trans* to “[tell] a story about the political history of gender variance that is not limited to one experience.”²¹ This means that this book brings together people with different experiences, from cross-dressing to *travestismo* to intersexuality. First, it explores the history of a wide repertoire of medical and social practices that include the use of clothing, cotton, rubber, self-injected hormones or liquid silicone, cosmetic and gender-affirmation surgeries, prosthetics, and document forging, among others. This book recognizes the daily production of knowledge with which people embodied their gender beyond social expectations, and across institutions and community spaces. It also studies everyday violence as technologies of embodiment with which state and civil agents sought to control trans embodiment, for example, the practice of forced haircuts or the denial of access to gender-affirmation treatments. Second, the book examines the transformations of the notion of sex and the development of the multiple meanings that doctors, patients, social movements, sexual dissidents, writers, journalists, and judges assigned to it. Third, it establishes a connection between trans embodiment practices and gender-normative technologies for cisgender men and women. Even if the body is just one of the multiple dimensions of trans experiences, this book places the trans body at the core of history because it is the point of intersection between the normative forces of nation- and citizenship-building on one hand and people’s own desires on the other.

The historical analysis of this transgressed frontier, popularly called “sex change” during the twentieth century, offers insights into the conflicting language with which people have made sense of these fluid changes.²² Focusing on this bordering space conceptualized under the idea that people changed from one sex to another helps us

explore how this concept changed over time by paying attention to the multiple and conflicting meanings it has acquired: from a reference to the alleged impossibility of transforming one's sex through clothing and homemade techniques during the first half of the twentieth century to the biotechnological procedures and further politicization of the sex change.²³ Focusing on this frontier allows us to study practices beyond precarious sexual identities. Sex change is a vector for examining practices that did not always correspond with a stable identification or a period of history. It is a window into the heart of twentieth-century gender architecture: *sex*.²⁴

The core contention of *A Body of One's Own* is that trans knowledge, practices, and technologies played a vital role in shaping the modern notion of sex as a central legal, cultural, and social bodily logic. Although not a medical history, the book nevertheless shows how conceptualization of sex and practices related to it deeply changed as a consequence of the consolidation of medical fields such as endocrinology, the global circulation of sexology, the dissemination of articles in the press about people who allegedly changed their sex, the popularization of homemade technologies, trans self-embodiment, and the rise of visible new sexual identities. This interaction made new medical procedures available for the first time. For example, since the mid-1930s some local doctors with a strong influence in the legal system began to pay more attention to sex as a multifactorial condition that combined “chronic, gonadal, hormonal, genital, civil, psychic and social elements.”²⁵ Some of these doctors developed treatments, surgical procedures, and techniques that guaranteed the affirmation of self-perceived gender even if it was prohibited in law. Likewise, trans people also developed homemade technologies and techniques of embodiment. Newspapers, books, and comics described the new technological changes of sex and popularized words such as *travesti* and *transsexual*, thus shaping new ideas of how sex and gender could be interpreted. In this sense this monograph points to how trans practices—and their role in scientific and popular culture—were key agents in the transformation of gender embodiment in Argentina.

However, as the book also shows, the new possibilities that resulted from these transformations led to tensions with other social actors, especially with policy makers and law enforcement agents who tried to control the diverse interpretations of what sex was. Parliamentarians, judges, doctors, and bureaucrats tried to regulate possible body modifications as a consequence of the belief that they put the reproduction of the population, the key to national development, in danger. Judges rejected increasingly influential medical perspectives by claiming that the only way of determining a person's "legal sex" status was by examining their genital sex appearance. At the same time, popular technologies and techniques deployed by the trans community challenged, and sometimes affirmed, the attempts to control the boundaries of gender incarnation and belonging.

Argentina offers a particularly useful context in which to study trans embodiment. Unlike other countries where access to gender-affirmation surgery was restricted but still allowed under certain conditions from the 1960s onward (the United States) or existed in a legal vacuum (Chile and Mexico), in Argentina the 1944 decree No. 6216 prohibited any intervention that led to sterilization, and from 1967 law No. 17132 prohibited surgeries that affected reproductive organs (something similar happened in Brazil, where people needed legal authorization to pursue surgeries affecting their reproductive organs).²⁶ Moreover, different legal codes had penalized homosexual and trans public sociability from the 1930s onward, with explicit condemnation of people who dressed as the "opposite sex."²⁷ This criminalization transformed trans people's daily lives into public transgressions and threatened their right to existence. In addition, it made gender-affirmation procedures clandestine, expensive, and dangerous. As a reaction to this, the trans movement placed Argentina in the vanguard of trans rights in the twenty-first century. In 2012 the Parliament passed the Gender Identity Law (26.743), establishing that every citizen has to be recognized by their self-perceived gender and forcing public and private healthcare to provide free access to gender-affirmation treatments. In 2021 the

government also approved a law promoting trans employment (27.636) and creating nonbinary documents (476/21).

Even if the core of this monograph focuses on Argentina, its global scope shows the role of transnational and transregional connections in the making of sexual and body cultures. By taking into account the formulation of global sexual science and its local translation among doctors, as well as the appropriation and attaching of new meanings by LGBTTTIQ+ communities, it maps the routes of such discourses and their hybridization in the making of modern sexual identities and languages. In addition, by retracing and analyzing the circulation of photographs, drawings, newspaper articles, memories, books, theater performances, underground shows, and ephemera, the book considers the role of a transnational global culture in the making of hybrid local travesti embodiment. Finally, this book explores the role of migration and mobility in the shaping of trans corporeal cultures. For example, it studies migration from smaller cities in Argentina to the capital, Buenos Aires; moving abroad to avoid police control and to be sex workers in Europe, or to obtain medical treatments in the United States and Chile; and the travels of artists related to dance performances. It shows how migration allowed some trans men to forge their documents so that they could be legally recognized by their names. It also explores the transnational networks of circulation of knowledge and technologies, such as the fact that travestis learned the technique to produce homemade silicone breasts in Salvador de Bahia (Brazil) during the 1980s or the role of internet chats for embodying trans masculinities and popularizing information about the use of testosterone in the 1990s.

Archiving Life

A Body of One's Own shows how understanding broader social, political, and cultural processes through the body can transform our analytical apparatus and bring us further methodological challenges. Even if the idea that marginalized communities archived precarity and state regulations in their bodies sounds abstract, this book

explores it as a material experience. In a recent book, some travesti survivors of state violence described how police officers used the doors of police stations to smash their breasts, which had been created with silicone injections. Police agents knew that this could create a migration of the material that, in the future, could even lead to death.²⁸ In addition, the treatments themselves—a product of forced experimentation in the shadow of a state that persecuted these practices—have left many travestis with painful side effects. The prohibition of gender-affirmation practices created an underground market in body-transforming treatments. In interviews, some trans people described to me the risky treatments offered by some doctors in private illegal installations, which, beyond dangerous, left them with lifelong side effects. However, these treatments embodied more than pain and physical wounds; trans people also embodied the joy of building corporealities that expressed how they felt and wanted to be read in society. Beyond the more classical challenges for archival research, this book therefore contributes to the broader question about working with documented bodily experiences.

Here I take metaphorical inspiration from Marx's idea of "living machines," a concept that describes how capitalist societies transformed workers' bodies to address bodies themselves as living laboratories and archives. Talking about bodies as living laboratories refers to a double dimension. First, it shows how medical and popular experimentation and interventions over trans bodies constituted a scenario to produce an alignment between bodies, gender, and citizenship. The second refers to how trans people experimented with their bodies in order to produce knowledge and technologies of gender affirmation. This book pays attention to the challenges of reading through documentary sources and testimonies to the embodiment of life itself. While working with the traces of silicone, joy, and the scars of violence, this history remembers that we are all archiving life, but that some bodies are violently marked as artificial entities, thus undermining their right to a dignified life.

This book talks about the archival and experimental dimensions of bodies for two reasons. The public portrayal of trans bodies as objects of science, policy making, and media consumption was central to formulating social hierarchies and defining the frontiers of gender belonging. Representing trans lives as eccentric abnormalities was vital for building a division between those bodies considered artificial (trans) and natural (cisgender).²⁹ Likewise, state agents attempted to police sex by pushing those practices of embodiment to the margin of the law, creating a space of experimentation for embodying gender, which in some cases—for example, silicone injections—could lead to dangerous side effects. The interconnection of those experimenting with their body plasticity and the public portrayal of those experiences built community knowledge for gender embodiment. This book explores the methodological challenges of reconstructing how trans people embodied these experiences.

As I expand upon in the epilogue, no methodology is possible without placing myself (and my own body) as a constructor of this historical narrative. As a cisgender white Latin American gay historian, I know that my book is based on privilege: having the time, training, and funding to write about trans lives. Working with these materials forced me to think about how I have archived my own life experience, those ways in which I negotiated my class, race, and gender belonging. As a first critical methodological consideration, I question how cisgender bodies have been considered natural in contraposition to the alleged manufactured nature of trans bodies. I am not talking here about guilt but about a crucial question of how our society has built the boundary between cis and trans bodies. The question about the legacies of the cis/trans frontier should help us revisit the everyday practices with which cisgender people (including myself) have reproduced the mechanisms of trans exclusion. In the background of this book, there is a preoccupation with civil society's role in consuming journalistic articles that mock trans bodies or in excluding many trans people from formal education and employment.

Even if distance is sometimes helpful in order to de-identify ourselves as researchers from documentary sources, it was impossible not to engage with the lives I was telling. To counterbalance medical concepts or the registers of state agents, I created a radical reading of grassroots archives to avoid extending the power of the physicians and nation-state agents reproduced in the public archives. In this sense I used several documents to reconstruct lives usually erased from history. I highlight how decisions that appear implicit, such as the gender pronouns in my descriptions, are embedded within an analytical perspective toward these lives. This conscious position proposes an alternative analysis of documents focused on body experiences, one that goes beyond other elements, such as erotic practices.

This monograph is guided by a simple methodological principle: trusting the words people have used to give meaning to their lives. This is not easy; this perspective has a conjectural dimension, because gender can be fluid over the life cycle, and documentary sources are fragmentary. While reading people's poses in photographs, their few statements, or their life practices, I tried to make sense of their gendered desire for themselves, knowing that this attempt is always at risk of failing. The monograph addresses the healing power of history beyond the ruthless rules of mainstream archives, interrogating the power of those who classified these stories. It is a call to try to understand our subjects on their terms, as the necessary respect for sovereignty over their own bodies; a call to distrust, always knowing the risks, a past that is represented as stable and inflexible.

This book uses a rich corpus collected from more than twenty public and private archives. It includes newspaper articles, comics, and magazine special issues; medical, policy, police, and specialist legal articles; popular culture; recordings of 1980s and 1990s TV shows; records of trials against doctors who performed gender reassignment/confirmation surgeries, those who requested their sex to be changed, and people accused of dressing as the "opposite sex" in public spaces; reports from the police secret service; unedited material, such as personal letters and photographs; and personal

memoirs published by trans writers. This book revisits classic documentary sources analyzed by other colleagues and brings them into dialogue with new documents and a refreshing perspective that is less attached to identity questions, offering an alternative reading focused on embodied meanings and practices.

I expanded archival research in the conversation with travesti, transgender, transsexual, and trans people who transitioned before the 2000s and are recognized by other members of their community as members of a previous generation. We usually started with a conversation of two or three hours guided by an open questionnaire. I also held informal conversation during my fieldwork in Argentina that helped me contrast with the archives of the media and medical narrative and reconstruct how some trans people experienced (or at least remember) their struggles for gender affirmation during the second half of the twentieth century. Many of the participants preferred to share their stories to help me build a general background of their experiences, rather than providing an individual testimony. For those who wanted to be named, I allowed them to decide if they wanted to be named or to pick a pseudonym to avoid being recognized. In parallel I interviewed cisgender scholars with experience working with trans communities since the 1990s and with physicians working on trans health, to expand my perspective on the issue. I work on these materials along with life-history interviews already available online to recognize potential common experiences, a background that expands our historical imagination to other trans histories. This is not an oral history book, but it was enriched by these conversations and also by reading the emergent text written by trans people about their own recollections.

The book wouldn't exist without close collaboration with grassroots archives, such as the Archivo de la Memoria Trans and the Archivos Desviados. In their struggle to challenge trans and queer erasure from national memory, both archives provided me access to valuable material and testimonies. They are building collections that, in contrast with the closed nature of some private collections, are part of a broader effort to create an inclusive archival policy.

Visual artifacts, such as photography and cartoons, played a particular role in this book. They show how the circulation of photographs and illustrations of people who transformed their bodies and their stories was vital for boosting the idea of affirming gender as a living possibility.³⁰ The book pays attention to visual material, from self-portraits to medical illustrations, always understanding the visual material conditions of production and the tensions of these materials as a space of encounter. The book also explores visual spaces as scenarios of conflict in which doctors, journalists, and trans people struggle for the possible readings of their bodies.³¹

In the following chapters, I make visible my struggles when working with these materials and offer some methodological notes on how I decided to use them. I am aware that many of these photographs are traces of state or medical violence; they are the product of the inequalities that forced trans people to talk about their lives in particular ways and negotiate how they would be remembered. I decided to use some of these photographs because, as Kevin Coleman shows in his analysis of the photographic archives of the United Fruit Company in Central America, sometimes photographs allow us to think about all the images the archives don't want us to see.³² Working with traditional and grassroots archives helped me expand my historical imagination beyond the material historical erasure produced by compulsory (cis)heteronormativity in the archives. Here I take inspiration from Adrienne Rich on how the construction of the heterosexual (and cisgender) norm was built by materially destroying documents—photographs, letters, books—that documented queer experiences.³³ In this case I would stress how traditional archives usually preserved images of trans people in which they are typically portrayed as abnormal subjects; doctors and journalists usually tried to present them as alleged liars or the products of medical interventions. Bringing photographs produced in jails together with personal portraits expands our imagination to all those images that did not survive, moments of happiness and sorrow that are to some degree becoming visible through trans

archival action. When these photographs usually preserved in traditional archives enter into dialogue with those preserved by community archives, such as the Trans Memory Archive, we can expand our historical imagination to see not only the violence that produced most records but also the struggles of trans people to negotiate their public portrayal.

This book also explores paradoxes of queer visibility politics. As significant as making trans existence visible is for legitimizing trans struggles, this claim for visibility forged a mainstream understanding of the alleged invisibility of trans lives in traditional archives as a symbol of material erasure. Some historians have often challenged me in presentations and claimed I didn't have enough evidence about these lives, reproducing the current main antitrans narrative that claims an alleged social deviation of the present. However, we must understand that visibility is a contemporary issue. In fact, invisibility was, for a long time, a crucial strategy for many people crossing the frontiers of gender. The gaps and absences in archives can be read in more than one way: both as a manifestation of erasure (which in many cases it was) and as a result of people avoiding communal and state policing of their gender.

Queer historians have debated the responsible use of documents of this nature. Elena Martinez formulated a valid question about how "all historical representations carry the responsibility of thinking not just about how they are coloured by present categories, memories, and political concerns but about how they can avoid enacting or reenacting forms of historical violence."³⁴ While looking at the dozens of photographs produced or collected by doctors and police officers, I question how I should use them and how I could avoid reproducing their foundational violence. In his study of trans visual archives during the Franco era in Spain, Javier Galeano explored how historical writing could work with materials usually produced for medical pathologization or social control. While the "ethics of turning away" from police and forensic documents on trans experiences could help us avoid enacting the violent institutional portrayal of trans bodies as sexual monstrosities, avoiding them

could also erase trans people from the historical narrative. Fernández Galeano engages with trans activists and scholars' statement that "visibility means existence" to explore how historical writing can produce a narrative focused on the trans agency of self-representation through medical or criminal photography. In his own words, he proposes that "visual materials created by trans women, even when archived as part of their prosecution, provide a means to reach beyond a forensic analysis and toward transhermeneutics, namely, trans women's reading of their own self."³⁵

In this sense my book shows how trans history can place these photographs in a historical narrative that goes against the intentions with which they were created. As Elizabeth Edwards points out, photographs are material things made in a certain way to "fulfil the social and cultural expectations regarding them."³⁶ I understand them as conflictive spaces that preserve the material practices and aspirations of the photographers and the desires of those photographed. While physicians in alliance with police officers or journalists used photographs of trans people to challenge their gender embodiment publicly, historians can create a narrative that can give those photographs a new life by recognizing the history of violence that made them possible but also, even more critically, bringing to the foreground the efforts of those portrayed to have full sovereignty over their bodies.

(Trans) Historical Imagination

A Body of One's Own is the first comprehensive historical study in English of both male and female trans body experiences in Argentina (and Latin America) in the twentieth century. This book is not a complete history; every study has several limitations. Due to the nature of my documentary sources, trans women's experiences tend to be more visible than those of trans men. I hope this book sparks the writing of more histories that trace those male experiences of the past, something that some brilliant scholars in the field are already doing.³⁷

This monograph dialogues with trans studies, an area that has grown rapidly in recent decades.³⁸ Interdisciplinary dialogues have enabled questions about the methodological challenges of studying trans pasts.³⁹ Trans historiography has recently questioned how to narrate experiences before the existence of modern identities, and how to avoid limiting social experiences to anachronistic categories.⁴⁰ Previous literature has pointed out the risk of universalizing the trans subject, and therefore denying geographical and temporal particularities.⁴¹ Far from projecting modern identities onto the past, this monograph values the diversity of logics with which some people gendered their bodies to define themselves as male or female against social norms.⁴² In Argentina a small group of scholars has studied the making of trans identities,⁴³ their cultural representation in literature and the press, and how legal-medical discourses sought to achieve control over trans bodies. This study contributes to scholarship that aims to understand how the practices and notions surrounding gender transgressions have shaped the notion of sex itself and interconnects practices beyond clear identity boundaries.⁴⁴

This monograph connects with studies that have explored the construction of modern sexuality as a discursive field of governmentality.⁴⁵ Like previous studies, it problematizes the idea that medical knowledge had only a normative intervention into dissident sexualities by highlighting the complex interaction between attempts to control them and the development of new possibilities of embodiment. It explores the dialectical process between the changing notion of sex and the techniques that made these transformations possible, while recognizing the agency of trans people in the negotiation, appropriation, and development of medical and nonmedical embodiment practices.⁴⁶

While previous literature on the Argentine history of sexuality has mainly focused on sexual and political identities, this book addresses the centrality of the body. The monograph's focus on the frontiers of gender belonging allows us to reinforce the perspective of queer and trans history in order to acknowledge mechanisms of gender

embodiment and recognition beyond stable identities. In this sense, as I expand on in [chapter 1](#), the book calls our attention to the risks of basing historical narrative on pre-fixed identities and how they can produce teleological one-way histories. This book shows the risks of reducing pre-identitarian history to modern identities and calls on us to open our imagination to multiple erotic and gendered desires.

This monograph also enriches the history of sexuality in the Americas.⁴⁷ Earlier literature looked at the politics of radical homosexual movements⁴⁸ as well as urban sociability and identities.⁴⁹ However, in previous studies on Argentina, male homosexuality prevailed over other expressions of sexual dissidence. This could be explained by the fact that there are more documents about men's sexualities because doctors and policy makers considered the management of such sexualities central to national development.⁵⁰ Moreover, as a whole, the Argentine historiography on sexuality has paid more attention to identities of sexual orientation, which sometimes overshadowed the complexities of embodiment. In some cases this led to a cisgendered bias that reduced gendered bodies to their genitalia. *A Body of One's Own* goes beyond such studies to consider forms of sexual dissidence that remain little explored in Argentina and Latin America. In concordance with its main argument, this monograph highlights how studying gender belonging provides useful insight into the study of embodiment beyond sexual identities and orientation, such as sexual invert, travesti, heterosexual, or homosexual. This monograph values the diversity with which some people gendered their bodies in order to define themselves as men or women against social expectations.

Embodying Citizenship

In recent decades citizenship has become a central concept in historical work. While some studies have mostly focused on status—the legal and cultural meanings that make someone a citizen—this book endorses the emphasis on practices, the activity of being a citizen.⁵¹ Like earlier literature, by analyzing a wide spectrum of state and community politics of belonging as bodily experiences, this book

approaches citizenship as comprising the material, legal, emotional, and practical processes that produce a person as part of a social group.⁵² Rather than reducing citizenship to a state top-down recognition, I pay attention to what makes someone feel that they are, and what makes society recognize them as, a member of a community. Undocumented activism in the US has opened a debate over whether citizenship serves as a historical concept. In Argentina, by contrast, claims of citizenship have less to do with top-down state recognition than with the bottom-up politics of community belonging. My perspective is enriched by Marcia Ochoa's proposal of reimagining citizenship beyond the centrality of the state, to recognize the practices with which trans people have routinely negotiated such rights as community belonging and gender recognition by other people.⁵³ I take up recent conceptualizations of the notion of citizenship that situate it in everyday acts (such as walking down the street or being called by one's correct name), a political, affective, and cultural practice that goes beyond an institutionalized bundle of rights and duties that marks one's individual membership status as a citizen before the state. This also means recognizing daily experiences of violent ties to the state, the bodily experience of material and subjective violence that condemned those who did not conform to binary gender norms.⁵⁴ By analyzing practices at the margins of the law, consulting trial and police records, and studying the transformation of sex as a core category in the building of citizenship, this monograph sheds light on the role of sexuality in the construction of social and political orders.⁵⁵

Placing trans lives at the core of contemporary history transforms our understanding of how social belonging has been shaped in Argentina. This book challenges the mainstream organization of national history into the binary democracy/dictatorship by tracing the long history of violence against those bodies considered to be sexually deviant. Like previous studies, this book shows how policies that have restricted queer sociability from the 1930s until the twenty-first century open questions about the nature of Latin American

political regimes.⁵⁶ By exploring the authoritarian nature of sexual government, this book also moves beyond traditional political periodization to pay attention to political regimes as lived bodily experiences. Bringing back the classic problem of feminist history—how women’s exclusion reframed our conceptualization of the universal vote—this book depicts the restriction of trans people from free movement and the denial of ownership over their bodies as an expression of the heterosexual and cisgender limits of Argentine democracy.

This attention to the governability of sex can be understood in dialogue with what authors such as Jules Gill-Peterson call the “cis state”: “a strategy of state power that defines citizenship through an obligatory alignment of physical anatomy with legal gender markers and visual appearance. Crucially, in making this alignment a condition of access to public life, as well as a policeable, punishable status when it is not achieved or maintained, the state also reserves for itself the exclusive right to define what counts as legitimate anatomy, gender, and appearance.”⁵⁷ In this text I am interested in how the state attempts to modulate transness by making a distinction between trans/cis bodies, affecting all citizens by affirming state sovereignty over all citizens’ bodies.

Likewise, as well as studying the impact of this top-bottom state attempt at governability, the book provides privileged insight into the everyday making of citizenship. By studying the legal, social, cultural, and political struggles surrounding sex, *A Body of One’s Own* offers a deep theoretical and historiographical review of this topic. Recent studies have revealed the role of sexuality in the remaking of the languages of citizenship in contexts of democratization after dictatorships.⁵⁸ This book widens this discussion to explain the multiple dimensions in which citizenship was negotiated.

My approach to citizenship is inspired by the political theory of the travesti activist Lohana Berkins, who theorized on the challenges of adjusting the travesti experience to the static and binary language of the state and proposed strategic uses of the law to achieve social

freedom.⁵⁹ Similarly to Ochoa, Berkins opened the door to unexpected uses of the law beyond the rule of the state. As she stated, even the Gender Identity Law in 2012 demanded choosing between the binary female/male for the ID; she said, “I am a travesti, and I will remain the same. Why should I change my story to conform to a norm? [. . .] In concrete legal terms, when I make a purchase with my debit card, and they request my ID, I will not have to argue about who I am. The document doesn’t express who you want to be: it will say that you are a person that fits into the fiction of the law.” In this, as in many interventions, Berkins theorizes about the practical uses of legal rights to navigate everyday hostility, which we can read in dialogue with a long history of document forgery that I reconstruct here.⁶⁰ In its exploration of the broad trans experience, this monograph shows how everyday politics is materialized in the body by, for example, viewing police persecution as a physical gendered experience. This monograph also offers an interpretation that decenters the role of the state to highlight other kinds of cultural and social recognition of the self-perceived gender or other kinds of civil violence. By zooming in on individual stories over the century, the book reconstructs the multiple practices and conditions in which some people were able to achieve degrees of recognition in certain communities, even in some cases gaining legal permission to acquire a new gender. Placing the state’s power to determine gender together with other social mechanisms makes our understanding of citizenship more flexible and situated.

Decentralizing Histories of Health, Technology, and Medicine

This book contributes to the displacement of doctors and scientists as the main protagonists of the history of science, health, and technology. It shows how subjects who were expected to be merely passive objects of scientific knowledge developed knowledge themselves and even experimented with their bodies. Concepts such as trans practices are useful to analyzing how cis and trans people embodied themselves by making and remaking longer-lasting gender

structures, changing notions of what it means to be male or female.⁶¹ Likewise, this book adopts concepts from social studies of science, such as gender technologies that have challenged the seemingly neutral condition of medical practice and knowledge. This approach allows us to understand techniques and technologies as symptoms and constructors of situated notions of sex and gender.⁶²

A Body of One's Own has been enriched by Latin American travesti theory, a field that some activists use to define the body of concepts and perspectives developed by their social movements.⁶³ Lohana Berkins has criticized queer theory from the Global North and noted the risks of the universalization of transgender identity.⁶⁴ In contrast, she emphasizes travestis' strength in producing a theory grounded in Latin American experiences. This book addresses the power of their analytical tools as historical concepts to analyze everyday body-making.⁶⁵

An example of the potential of this conceptual body is *trucaje*, which summarizes metaphorically how this book approaches the history of technology. As Marlene Wayar points out, this word emerged in travesti/marica slang in the mid-twentieth century and can be translated into English as "trick." At the beginning it defined the techniques used to hide the bulge of the penis. But *trucaje* can also be used to name a wider range of techniques of embodiment. It recognizes institutional and informal spaces of knowledge production and goes beyond identities to recognize sexually dissident practices of embodiment.⁶⁶ *Trucaje* defines the innovative and self-fashioning corporeal skills of travestis and sexual inverts beyond identity boundaries, to appropriate cisgender technologies or invent new ones. Used flexibly, the word allows us to recognize the coexistence of diverse temporalities in which silicone, hormones, prostheses, clothing, forged documents, makeup, cotton, and hairstyles, among other elements, have coexisted and received diverse meanings in specific social groups. *Trucaje* breaks the temporal meaning attached to techniques as handcrafted and technologies as elaborated methods, to define the mixing of practices

and knowledge with which people have affirmed their gender over time.

This inspiration helps us understand how this book approaches the multiple coexisting temporalities of gender experiences of embodiment and challenges the mainstream narrative on trans histories, which is usually structured in two temporalities: a time of “social transitions,” characterized by clothing and gestures, a period temporally located from the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, and a second period of “medical transitions,” when hormones and medical treatments allegedly dominated experiences of gender transition. This book complicates this dual temporal structure by showing the coexistence of both biotechnological and prosthetic technologies of gender embodiment through time.

Trucaje also reveals the role of oral tradition in community knowledge production. The term has been used by the travesti community to highlight the fact that they perform a kind of magic in the making of their physical experience. While cisgendered body transformation is usually accepted as natural, *travestis* have been forced to overcome social and state limits in their search for their right to the body. This concept reveals the emotional power of success of embodiment against daily social violence, the beauty and the pleasure created by their achievement.

* * *

This book is organized into five thematic and roughly chronological chapters. The first studies the practices and portrayals of public transgression in the early twentieth century. The chapter analyzes nonconforming gender expressions before the emergence of biomedical gender-affirmation practices and the state’s open intervention against queer public sociability in the 1930s. The chapter focuses on gender embodiment experiences. It explores the relevance of gender transgression for the definition of sexual and racial boundaries, and how some people negotiated these social hierarchies to achieve social recognition.

[Chapter 2](#) analyzes the medicalization of gender transitions in the mid-twentieth century. The chapter explores portrayals and practices that affirmed gender under medical guidance. Of particular interest is how the narrative of the “wrong body”—the idea of being trapped in a corporeal biological mistake correctable by medicine—mediated a broader social experience with gender transgression. Likewise, the chapter studies how conflict in defining the limits of science led to new conflicts between science, trans people, and the law, which ended in an unprecedented state policy banning gender-affirmation practices (1967), policy that affected surgeries affecting reproductive organs.

The third chapter explores the globally influenced making of travesti culture in Argentina. This chapter argues that the worldwide circulation of theater performances, journalistic articles, and books participated in the formation of a travesti culture. The chapter analyzes how the emergence of *travesti artistas* in the mainstream cultural circuit (1960s) transformed the local queer culture of embodiment. It also expanded a corporeal code based on the idea of the natural as the primary value of female beauty and realness that would be eclipsed by the silicone revolution in the 1980s.

Next, [chapter 4](#) analyzes how male and female trans people have challenged state restrictions by producing knowledge and homemade technologies to affirm their gender since the 1970s. It explores a repertoire of embodiment practices from clothing to hormones. The chapter explores how people experimented with their bodies to affirm their gender beyond legal and medical control and how this pushed them into precarious conditions. Finally, it addresses how activists formulated an alternative body discourse that challenged the biotechnological promise of an alleged “correct body” as an undeniable trans future.

The fifth chapter analyzes how the travesti and transsexual movement politicized the right to gender affirmation. It studies the role of daily violence, resistance, alternative discourses, and collective battles as technologies of embodiment. It points out how the material experience of exclusion and practices of collective belonging contributed to the making and unmaking of ephemeral

citizenship. The chapter focuses on the formation and convergence of two agendas: one focused on the right to freedom of movement and the other on the right to affirm gender and be legally recognized, which led to the passing of the Gender Identity Law (2012).

* * *

The title *A Body of One's Own* calls for the connection of trans histories with broader political thinking about body sovereignty and autonomy. In this sense the reference in the title to one of the foundational texts of feminist history—Virginia Woolf's marvelous essay *A Room of One's Own*—responds to those who would disconnect trans and feminist traditions. This book is about all those beautiful experiments of freedom, in the sense defined by Saidiya Hartman.⁶⁷ While it touches on social movements, it is not a political but an embodied history, it is about the small struggles for freedom—with the risks and tragedies that accompany every experiment. It is a book about the multiple negotiations for defining the limits of state and civil ownership not only of trans bodies but of everyone's bodies. This book is a call for everyone's right to have a body of one's own.

CHAPTER 1

Cut from a Different Cloth

Gender Transgressions in the Early Twentieth Century



Figure 1.1. Doctor Faussone (*left*) posing with the “man-woman” (*right*). National General Archive (AGN). Photographic Department (PD). *Caras y caretas*: I139478.

In 1902 a police officer imprisoned an Indigenous person from Rio Negro (Patagonia) for using a “false sexual identity.” The police took her to the Institute of Legal Medicine in the main city of the province, Viedma, where Dr. César Faussone took numerous pictures of the person and classified her as an *hombre-mujer* (man-woman) and an *invertido* (invert).¹ The photographs were taken thirty years

after the campaign in which the Argentine state had taken Indigenous land and forced the integration of Indigenous people, primarily as a labor force. *Caras y caretas* (CyC), one of the most popular magazines of the period, published the pictures along with a short article.²

Faussone showed himself intrigued by the presence of the *hombre-mujer*; she did not coincide with the dominant legal and scientific parameters of gender at the time. However, according to the journalists, she was an important female member of her small town of General Frías, with its mixed white, creole, and Indigenous population. Her neighbors often chose her as the godmother at baptisms because of her talent for knitting and sewing clothes. In contrast, the journalist described her as a disguised subject with male pronouns: “He is an indigenous subject who dressed as a woman and served as godmother in baptisms, being very much celebrated by the neighbours of those distant places.” And the writer added that “despite his women’s clothing, this subject was a man, but as the original lady caused neither harm nor damage, being an honest and hard-working person, and highly skilled in weaving, embroidery, and other feminine labors, no one ever noticed her strange obsession for disguising her sex. The subject is a man when dressed as a man, and dressed as a woman is a woman: this is undeniable.”³

The photographs published in *Caras y caretas* portrayed the dominant ideas about gender transgressions in the early twentieth century particularly well. They conveyed imaginaries about the sexual and racial boundaries of the modern Argentinean nation, and the limits of a citizenship defined by contrasts: male/female, white/Indigenous, civilization/barbarism, medicine/pathology, elite/poor, and urban/rural. The narrations of this Indigenous body show how ideas of gender and race converged in specific spaces. Buenos Aires cultural elites insisted on imagining Patagonia as a lawless space to be civilized, a space inhabited by sexually and racially disordered subjects who threatened the homeland.⁴ The inverted points of view in these photographs expressed conflicts and

anxieties about how, through the uses of objects, gestures, and activities, certain bodies were understood as male or female.

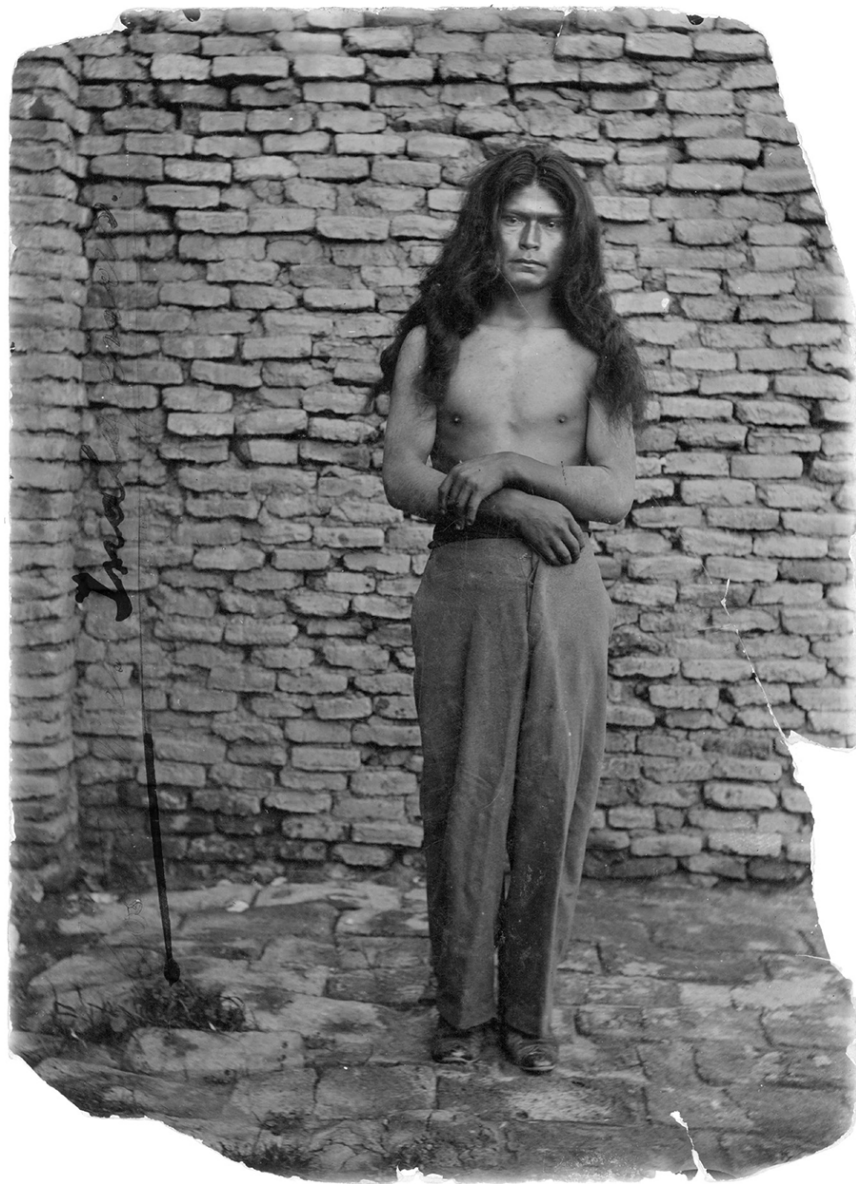


Figure 1.2. The “man-woman” photograph used by the magazine *Caras y Caretas*. National General Archive (AGN). Photographic Department (PD). *Caras y caretas*: I139478.

This chapter places related transgressive body experiences at the core of the Argentine modernizing project of the early twentieth century. It explores gender transgressions in the period before two major processes that happened in the mid-1930s: the slow

emergence of biotechnological gender-affirmation practices, such as the use of hormones, and the 1932 ban on dressing in public with “clothes of the opposite sex.”⁵ By doing so the chapter analyzes two conflicting forces. From above, it studies how the public portrayal of these gender-transgressive bodies was vital for making social boundaries that associated citizenship, nationhood, and sex with certain bodies. From below, it examines the creative mechanisms with which gender-variant people negotiated these boundaries and built practices of gender belonging.

This chapter shows how the widely accepted binary and restricted notion of sex acted as a scaffold for gender embodiment. This binary idea of male and female sex became a field of experimentation, a harness of embodiment that guided people who crossed gender boundaries. To say that *invertidos*, *mujeres-hombres*, and *hombres-mujeres* were cut from a different cloth points to the fact that by using the same clothing (dresses, corsets, trousers, neckties, and suits) and gestures as the dominant cisgender population, these people actively participated in shaping ideas of sex, reinforcing its everyday administration by activating social mechanisms of gender recognition, at the same time making it unstable by demonstrating how they were able to transgress a social norm widely considered to be “natural.”

The chapter has four sections. The first proposes an alternative new reading of the history of gender transgression in the early twentieth century, rooted in trans and queer historiography. The second section analyzes the era’s medical, artistic, and popular languages of gender transgression. The third section studies how gender-variant people negotiated these boundaries as an expanded notion of citizenship. The fourth and final section analyzes diverse feminine experiences of embodiment and these individuals’ incursion into public spaces as the prelude to their legal expulsion from those spaces.

An Inverted History of Body Transgressions

At the turn of the century, Buenos Aires became a symbol of Latin American progress. Argentina's integration into the global market and the agricultural export boom transformed the capital city: governments developed unprecedented infrastructure and fostered transatlantic migration to feed the demand for labor.⁶ However, in the shadows of the lights of modernity, the gloomy discontent of minorities who endured poverty and displacement spread throughout the urban landscape. A growing literature on vice and crime gave visibility to allegedly deviant bodies: sex workers, pimps, maricas, and invertidos became icons of the threat to the elite's dreamed-of nation.⁷

Stories about figures like the Indigenous hombre-mujer or invertido published in newspapers called attention to the multiple languages with which physicians, journalists, and police officers tried to make sense of those people crossing gender and sexual frontiers. As the next section shows, there was a multiplication of medical, popular, and artistic vocabularies to name fluid experiences that did not respond to a monolithic identity. Physicians, police officers, and journalists usually used words like *invertidos sexuales*, *pederastas*, *homosexuales*, or *uranistas* to name a diverse world of what they understood as male sexual deviations. These words referred to different practices, from cross-dressing to same-sex activity.⁸ In contrast, many historians believe that *marica*, even if not published in the media, was the word used among those considered abnormal to name different dissident sexual and gender practices.⁹ While these words may have different connotations for sexual dissidents and doctors, the cultural elites tend to build a representation of a unique subject dangerous for the nation.

Historians of sexuality (myself included) have usually confronted this challenging situation of understanding sexualities that escape our contemporary notions by using primary sources in which the words of physicians, police officers, and journalists generally predominated, rather than those of maricas and invertidos. As Gill-Peterson points out, there is still disagreement over the viability of including early twentieth-century figures in trans genealogies, rather

than lesbian or gay, because of the lack of clear separation between categories.¹⁰ While it is impossible to solve the lack of documentary sources or to place people in stable categories, I propose an inverted history that helps us to distance from the medical language that has reduced diverse experiences to their notion of homosexuality.¹¹ I join other historians to interrogate the complexities of sexual inversion to counterbalance those narratives that usually situated them in the genealogy of gay and lesbian identities. This means exploring the history of transness before the existence of concepts such as “transsexual,” while also being aware of the dangers of the anachronistic use of both trans and gay/lesbian tropes.¹² I propose an alternative reading to the previous understanding of these experiences by showing how a reading rooted in gender embodiment could allow us to focus on gender transgressions beyond reducing them to protosexual identities.¹³

Across the globe, various sexual expressions considered abnormal by doctors and police officers have prompted historians to reflect on how they could analyze experiences of sexual dissidence before the consolidation of modern sexual identities. Historians faced a significant challenge regarding how fields often used to trace identity genealogies, such as gay history, could develop tools to study complex sexual behaviors that didn’t adjust to our current understanding of the relationships between sexual practices and gender expression. One of the most influential responses was George Chauncey’s pivotal book *Gay New York*, in which he questions the idea that US gay men and lesbians have always lived in a closet, as well as the concept that gender and sexuality have always been distinct domains of personhood. Chauncey shows that queer people were not isolated, invisible, and self-hating during the first decades of the twentieth century until the emergence of the homo-heterosexual binary in the post–World War II world.¹⁴

Chauncey’s work inspired others to explore the erotic experience before the emergence of the binary homo-heterosexuality. Based on Chauncey’s analysis of fairies—effeminate subjects who had sex with young working-class men—Argentine queer historians studied

maricas as a similar model by showing how they participated in hierarchical sexual relationships with male partners who understood themselves as heterosexuals, following the social belief among the popular classes that sexual deviation was related to being penetrated.¹⁵ The attention to maricas was a reaction to a traditional gay history interpretation, represented by the initial Argentine historical works of Jorge Salessi, Osvaldo Bazán, and Daniel Bao, that tended to associate different erotic and gender expressions with the proto-formation of a homosexual identity (and its pathologization.)¹⁶ Mir Yarfitz points out, “Thus early histories often minimized the role of gender transgression or ‘reversal’ in many of the case studies, or interpreted the conflation of male same-sex attraction with effeminacy as homophobic.”¹⁷ Even if historians made a clear effort to avoid it, there is a more extended mainstream teleological common sense in which maricas’ sensibility would be displaced after Peronism (1945–55) by homosexuals, and then by the multiplication of other identities, such as travestis and gays, in the last decades of the century, which fails to see the diverse trajectories of these sensibilities and their coexistence through time.¹⁸ While the literature about maricas challenged reductionist perspectives by showing how maricas transgressed the contemporary understanding of sexual identity (and were even usually understood as a third sex),¹⁹ the expansion of this figure as the dominant model of the early twentieth century also runs the risk of reducing a multiplicity of experiences to a homogeneous narrative centered on these subjects’ erotic practices. Chauncey’s recent revision of his studies of fairies in New York helps us be aware of the risks of overexpanding the model of maricas to a wide range of diverse erotic and gendered experiences. He points out that even if he had explored fairies’ femininity that went beyond the model of homosexuality to understand how they acted as counterparts to the virilization of working-class men, he still reduced them to the spectrum of homosexuality. He did not consider that some people defined themselves as “women in the wrong bodies” a piece of evidence as important as fairies’ erotic gendered practices. While this does not

mean that we should reduce American fairies or local maricas to other modern categories, such as transgenderism, Chauncey points out how exploring the sexual inversion of embodiment, and its complex dialogue with sexual desire, could open new paths for queer history.²⁰ Yarfitz has pointed out that this apparent conflict between gay and trans lenses echoes social movements' efforts to legitimate themselves by seeking ancestors in the past, and he worries also that this can make static experiences that fluctuated and coexisted.²¹

This new reading problematizes previous approaches that reduced the analysis of gender and sexual transgression to erotic practices. While *queer* history has explored the making of the categories that gave meaning to sexual experiences and understood doctors' language as an attempt to build social order,²² here I propose an inverted history that sets gender embodiment at the core of its analysis. I am saying not that we should abandon the previous studies on maricas, but rather that we should open our narrative beyond sexual encounters in order to approach experiences of gender transgression. The inversion of this history does not aim to create a new essentialist history to replace the dominance of the gay with a predominant trans history. Instead, it seeks to invert the attention to sexual encounters with one based on gender embodiment to formulate an alternative narrative more concerned with understanding the flux beyond what was once understood as "sex" than with classifying these people in one category or another. It is a call for increased attention to how the lack of trust of previous historical perspectives on how the "feeling of inverting sex" was central for some subjects who reproduced the social understanding of sex at a given historical moment as inflexible and natural. In this sense, even though I am aware that the division between sexual orientation and gender embodiment was not yet defined, this chapter shows the diverse convergences and divergences that went far beyond medical reductionism.²³ This perspective pursues a reading that engages with the fact that gender encompasses far more than sexual desire and that "sexuality" does not always align in conventional ways with gender identity. But this approach also must

consider the risks of forcing an artificial separation of gender and sexuality as lived experiences.²⁴ A history focused on these body transgressions opens questions about the heterogeneous world of maricas and invertidos, about the possible disidentification between sexual practices and gender embodiment, and, more broadly, about the lived experience of inverting gender.

This chapter challenges the overrepresentation of male homosexual experience over other possibilities by bringing maricas and inverts into conversation with mujeres-hombres—a possibly offensive medical term used to define what we would today consider female-to-male transition. The chapter also shows how this erasure of experiences other than the male homosexual one has restricted the historical imagination of nonconforming and binary gender expressions before the consolidation of modern sexual identities. By bringing together male and female experiences against the gender assigned at birth, this chapter problematizes how these gendered experiences have been flattened to fit the history of “homosexuality.” It values the diversity of logic with which some people gendered their bodies to embody a male or female corporeality against social expectations. More concretely, by connecting multiple stories, it offers a new reading of subjects like inverts or maricas, in order to value the particularities of their gendered body construction. By focusing on the frontiers of gender embodiment, this study brings together multiple stories of those defined by others with pathologic labels that responded to different logics, such as mujeres-hombres, intersexuales, and invertidos sexuales, and how they experienced transgressing gender.

My inverted history explores the complex different meanings and desires usually compressed by the binary language of their times. A move away from close attention to sexual practices to center gender embodiment helps us to see how allegedly compact categories such as marica or invertido were attempts to make sense of very plural experiences. *Sexual inversion* was usually used by experts to define “gender reversal as much as same-sex sexual behavior, and many physicians understood them as part of the ‘third sex.’”²⁵ My proposal

for invert history seeks to open ourselves to seeing that multiple ways of inverting sex exist, and that not all of them can be reduced to sexual practices, as they were by doctors.

The most influential doctor working in this area in the early twentieth century was Francisco de Veyga. The notes on some of his case studies can help us to understand the existing differences between inverts seeking a more stable gender transgression and those people who engaged in sporadic cross-dressing.²⁶ The head of the Department of Legal Medicine at the Buenos Aires School of Medicine and a key figure in positivist social science, de Veyga worked in jails and influenced the local state-elite. He published several notes on patients imprisoned by the police. One of his patients, V.—whom doctors defined as a working-class man with “a feminine voice and gestures”—is a good example. V. worked in the house of a wealthy family as a domestic employee from the age of thirteen. He had been raped by the employer’s oldest son, with whom he continued having sexual encounters until he was fired. After that he sought out other manly partners. He moved in with a female sex worker, and he started selling sex and wearing female clothes. However, V. did not define himself as a woman, which made de Veyga notice that there existed a difference between feminization and “sex change.” (In those years, the concept didn’t have a medical conception. It was a term occasionally used to describe gender transgressions.) He wrote, “The use of disguise has not influenced his spirit as deeply as it has in many other inverts, making them believe in the definitive transformation of their sex; he has always, and at all times, kept his quality as a man in mind. Never has the feeling of his complete transformation taken possession of him.”²⁷ De Veyga contrasted this case with those of other patients who felt an internal sexual inversion, an expression usually undermined by doctors: “That ‘woman’s soul’ which so many of them claim to possess and in whose existence they have among themselves claimed to possess and in whose existence they have come to make many worthy observers believe, is nothing but a pure fantasy, or a delirious delusion.”²⁸ De Veyga observed how one of his prisoners articulated

“each and every attitude, detail, and taste in harmony with the tendencies and qualities belonging to the new adopted sex, this person takes pleasure in sleeping in long embroidered lace nightgowns, urinating in a squatting position, simulating childbirth in all its anguish and pains, wearing perfume, carrying flowers, and traveling to Brazil to perform in male brothels.”²⁹ Another example was Aurora, a thirty-year-old Paraguayan hairdresser and thief who was imprisoned in 1903. Even if de Veyga insisted that Aurora dressed as a woman to steal from men, he was surprised that along with a dress she was also using female underwear. While de Veyga argued that the “art of being real” included the use of women’s lingerie,³⁰ we could read it as an intimate practice of female gender belonging.

Drawing on a number of similar case studies, this chapter is a call to take the risk of creating an alternative history that focuses on the transgression of gender frontiers beyond erotic practices. This is not a call to build a new genealogy of modern identities that could lead to teleological narratives. Instead, it is an invitation to multiply our perspective in order to track the stories of those who have struggled to be able to live and be recognized on their own gendered terms.

Inverting “Sex”: Medical and Popular Languages of Gender Transgression

The hypervisibilization of images and stories of people transgressing gender emerged at a vital moment of consolidation of the Argentine nation-state. Physicians, police officers, policy makers, journalists, artists, and common people participated in an open conversation about the borders of gender. Even if, as Pablo Ben shows, the elite intention to police sexuality was distant from the realities of working-class everyday life experience, the representations of what doctors defined as *invertidos sexuales* or *mujeres-hombres*, as well as many other figures of gender transgression, open space for conversation between the medical, artistic, and popular languages about what sex was and what its limits were.³¹ In this section I am interested in reconstructing the increase in figures of “sexual

inversion” in the first decades of the century to understand the role they played in reinforcing a binary notion of “sex.” At the same time, I conjecture that these figures might have worked as “open scripts” that allowed a relative identification for those people seeking to transgress the rules of “gender.”

Concerns about people transgressing gender frontiers also emerged at a crucial time for the definition of the modern category of sex. Argentinian doctors understood sex as the external expression of genitals and the internal presence of reproductive organs in binary terms: men or women. However, the progressive development of global sexual sciences began to highlight that sex was defined by multifactorial elements, such as hormones. There was advocacy, for example, of the idea that there was a dominant and a dominated sex in every person. Yarfitz has highlighted the time lag of Argentine experts, most of whom continued to believe that sexual inversion could be socially acquired, in contrast with European doctors, who came earlier to believe that it was inherently congenital.³² Based on these conceptions, local physicians expressed urgent concern for same-sex spaces, such as prisons, military, and prisons. They believed in the role of public institutions in avoiding the spread of what they considered sexual pathologies in the shaping of the modern citizen.³³

Argentine physicians placed alleged deviating bodies in dialogue with broader debates among the elite about the central roles of immigration, race, and sexuality for the nation’s future. Because these discourses were both a hierarchical understanding of sex and gender and the emergence of a visible sex-deviant subculture, doctors’ public portrayals of allegedly deviant bodies worked as laboratories for the manufacturing of categories of social order. The circulation of stories and illustrations of *invertidos sexuales* was part of an effort by these cultural elites to merge their dream of social order with the flesh, one that sought to align gender, body, and citizenship.

Dr. Faussone’s photographs can be read as part of the role of physicians in Argentine state-building. Since the late nineteenth

century, medical discourses had legitimated a power restricted to wealthy landowners and promoted ideas of progress based on racial and gender hierarchies.³⁴ The photograph was an echo of the foundational act of consolidation of the state: the so-called conquest of the desert, a military campaign with which the Argentine state took control of Patagonia by defeating the Indigenous populations (Mapuche, Pampa, and Tehuelche, among others). The state forced the integration of Indigenous people as a labor force and expanded the agricultural frontier, which facilitated an unprecedented economic development.³⁵ Under conservative rule, the country's economy grew based on agricultural expansion, the modernization of the port cities, the development of transportation networks, and the export of raw materials. Elites embraced European migration to increase the labor force and to “civilize” the country, while at the same time restricting public power to a small minority of large landowners.

The photograph of the Indigenous body spoke to the elites' obsession with extending the power of civilization, usually imagined as a process rooted in Buenos Aires that needed to colonize the country. Faussone's words in *CyC* also recalled a long tradition of national elites' thinking that imagined Patagonia as a chaotic space dominated by Indigenous culture that needed to be socially, sexually, and racially organized.³⁶ Likewise, from the 1880s onward, the liberal elites' obsession with sameness was based on the invisibilization and hypervisibilization of those bodies that did not fit with the national model of the civilized white man. On the one hand, dominant discourses insisted on the success of the melting pot—a myth of the origin of the “Argentine race” that consisted in the mixing of people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds with a predominance of white population—in erasing alleged minorities such as Indigenous people or Afro-Argentines. However, on the other hand, as Kerr and Alberto's recent racial histories of Afro-Argentine and Indigenous visual portrayal show, the hypervisibilization of racialized bodies as sexually and socially

abnormal reinforced the idea that they were part of a past that the country needed to leave behind.³⁷

Faussone's photographs can be read in dialogue with a longer tradition of a paradoxical gendered image of Indigenous men, who were considered by non-Indigenous Argentines to be both sexually dangerous for white women in the frontier and, at the same time, not male or productive enough.³⁸ Since the mid-nineteenth century, the widespread circulation of Indigenous photographs had rooted the representation of bodily otherness in gender and racial dimensions. These images participated in the definition of race as a vector with which ethnic borders were organized in Argentina in a socioeconomic and cultural code. Argentine racial hierarchies were reconfigured in terms of class (by associating dark skin with lower incomes), geography (the backward interior as against the modern metropolis), and gender (a patriarchal order of men and women who had differentiated roles in the whitening of the nation).³⁹ In the massive market of postcards, Indigenous bodies were often painted in watercolors, such as many images of *caciques* (Indigenous political leaders), who were painted pink to produce a feminization of their bodies to exalt the male Argentinian domination over them.⁴⁰

The first decades of the twentieth century did not merely promote a distrust of Indigenous bodies; the cultural elites also depended on other images related to the underworld of working-class people to project to them their anxiety about stereotypical figures threatening national development. The cultural elites usually understood working-class and poor people's way of life as being marked by social degradation and in need of social reformation. In their writing and cultural production, the elites referred to stereotypes of sexual excess or abnormality to define racial, gendered, and class frontiers of national belonging, including stereotypes associated with the world of tango and referencing prostitutes, venereal diseases, hyper-virile pimps, criminals, the alleged immorality of working-class men, and the supposed laziness, or sexual menace, of Indigenous people.⁴¹ After the crisis of the liberal project, this long building process was

channelled in the 1930s, the period usually called the Infamous Decade and characterized by military dictatorships, with the accompanying empowerment of the police to eradicate “undesirable subjects” from public space.⁴²

The fact that Faussone used photographs for his medical project and to guarantee it a broader public circulation was in dialogue with longer efforts to define the racial boundaries of the alleged desirable Argentine sexuality. Photography has been central to the medical and anthropological project of body classification because it affirms the specialist domains over those bodies considered exotic, transforming them into objects of science.⁴³ Photography of naked Indigenous bodies at the time reinforced racial boundaries by portraying them as uncivilized subjects that did not fit in the modern civilized Argentina and deployed paradoxical sexualized fantasies about their alleged innocence or sexual immorality.⁴⁴ By showing the Indigenous body as an exotic transgression of modern rules, Faussone reaffirmed a pact with *Caras y caretas* readers about the limits of gender embodiment and civilization.

The photograph performed a double act: it attempted to reduce one body to an object of science while affirming the (implied white) readership’s identification against the uncivilized Indigenous person. The magazine published three pictures in which the doctor progressively undressed the man-woman to reveal her “true sex.” The two photos were portrayed in contrast as a mechanism for defining the racialized gender boundaries. In [figure 1.1](#), the Indigenous person is dressed and looking straight at the camera. She is in a public context in which Faussone portrays himself as agent of discovery in a game of contrasts. He embodies public rationality and social distinction in contrast with the Indigenous person labeled as an abnormal subject from the “remote regions of our country.”⁴⁵ The doctor’s personification of civilization organizes the social hierarchy of the woman by linking class, gender, and racialized prescriptions. The white Argentinian man observes the figure of the Indigenous “man-woman” and, as described by the journalist, defines nonurban areas as spaces that must be civilized, reducing the woman to an

object of science without a name. In [figure 1.2](#) the naked Indigenous body is used as proof of her “true sex.” She is shown in a house that introduces the reader to the idea of her intimacy, and the lack of breasts is shown as her unsuccessful femininity. Nevertheless, Fausstone’s desire to show her “secret” contrasts with her defiant emotionless affect, which acts as a counterpoint to his narrative. She expresses a mixture of shame and anger that challenges her position as a passive object of modern science. The normalization of the sexual anomaly and its disruption are metaphors for the tensions related to the embodiment of these social boundaries.⁴⁶

While physicians and policy makers used these transgressive bodies to define national boundaries by portraying Indigenous bodies as pathological, the dream of urban progress boosted by transatlantic migration quickly showed its shadows. An increasing disappointment grew in the medical literature among those trying to understand erotic and social forces beyond their control: prostitutes, maricas, and invertidos became symbols of a threatening danger polluting social progress.

The production of stories about people moving from one gender to another was an open laboratory of categories with which journalists and doctors produced a cultural boundary to separate those gender embodiments that were allegedly natural from those considered to be artificial. Before the state openly prohibited wearing clothing of the “opposite sex” in 1932, tabloid newspapers channeled concerns about those living with allegedly artificial masculinity or femininity. While there are disciplinary dimensions of the public experimentation with these bodies to define the limits of sex, I argue that at the same time the circulation of these stories and other cultural artifacts played a role in determining the potential plasticity of the social recognition of gender, one that made available knowledge of possible paths for transgressing gender rules. Far from considering social concern about these changes only as a normalizing limit, I interpret it as a symptom of how these actors labeled abnormal fed on these narratives and actively participated in shaping conflictive notions of “sex.”

Ideas about gender transgressions were quickly disseminated in the press and were easy to find for those seeking similar experiences. José Ingenieros—one of the most influential social thinkers of the time—called attention to what he defined as the *criminal's vanity*, the desire to be portrayed by doctors or journalists in order to achieve fame. Ingenieros conceptualized newspapers as “laboratories for criminal defense.”⁴⁷ Physicians were aware of the risks of their public experimentation to define the limits of sex. Francisco de Veyga, the doctor who conducted the most influential studies about *invertidos sexuales*, suspended his book project on *invertidos sexuales* under the assumption of the possible risks of popularizing such characters.⁴⁸ Ingenieros’s metaphor of newspapers as laboratories is helpful for understanding that while these portrayals were central to defining the social boundaries of sex, the representations of gender transgressions were also an open space of interpretation and identification.

Journalists and doctors worked to build an association between sexual deviation and crime. The vague vocabulary of the press generally used as synonyms terms related with sexual inversion and homosexuality and reproduced stories portraying any gender-transgressing as a synonym for danger and antinational practices. Usually called “female-dressed thieves,” these characters blurred the limits between social and gendered deviations. This also reveals that because of their social marginalization, many *invertidos* or *maricas* moved across the world of brothels and crime. These associations worked to portray them as dangerous, breaking both gendered and social rules. A good example is the case of a young man from Catamarca who was imprisoned in a train by a guard: “a woman who was not a woman was traveling in one of the cars, despite her skirts, petticoats, and Louis XVI boots, he was a fugitive from a prison riot.”⁴⁹ The anarchist press also reported the adventures of trade union leaders who wore women’s clothes to escape from the police.⁵⁰ Such stories inspired a number of humorous articles describing the police’s mechanisms for detecting people disguised as the “opposite sex.”⁵¹

Ideas about gender plasticity also became popular on the artistic circuit in gender impersonation shows called *transformismo*. Because of its integration into the global economic trade, the rapid growth propelled by transoceanic immigration, and public infrastructure development, Buenos Aires was consolidated as an attractive international leisure market.⁵² In the first decade of the century, the Italian artist Leopoldo Fregoli became a regular character in the theaters of Buenos Aires. In his shows he would change into different women's costumes quickly, drawing on an old French tradition. He first visited Buenos Aires in 1895 to present his act at the National Theater. Thanks to his increasing popularity, he decided to continue with new seasons and visited Argentina regularly until 1936.⁵³ Fregoli's performances were also recorded and sold for playing on gramophones.⁵⁴ This was not entirely new in the city where, from the early nineteenth century, the elite enjoyed French gender-impersonation shows.⁵⁵

Buenos Aires became a central stage of the global circuit of gender impersonation, and the popularity of this act spread among all social classes. In the major theaters, the shows were presented as family entertainment. Young ladies from high society attended, hoping to find potential husbands.⁵⁶ Likewise, anarchist cultural circles organized events with *transformistas* in working-class trade union centers.⁵⁷ Transformismo grew as a popular kind of show, with important local interpreters, such as the successful Aldo, famous for his character based on a Japanese geisha,⁵⁸ or Fátima Miris's *compadrito*, the classic male lower-class urban character from tango songs, performed regularly in theaters in Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Spain.⁵⁹ Popular shows such as *la marimacho*, in which men performing very effeminately told jokes, remained popular for several years.⁶⁰ In 1934 a well-known French performer presented himself at the Luna Park, one of the biggest theaters in the city. The show's posters featured a body half dressed as an elegant dandy and the other half in a dress, with the text: "It is not Adam, or

Eve, but a little of each.”⁶¹ In the 1940s transformismo was also performed in small working-class cabarets and cafés.⁶²

Even if this long European tradition was not the same as the other transgressions of gender rules discussed here, it was a platform of theatrical comedy based on a binary notion of sex that helped circulate a language and an aesthetic of crossing gender frontiers. A good example is that while in the nineteenth century these performances were contained on the stage, the popularization of these acts could also lead to moral anxiety among the elites. The French journalist Jules Huret highlighted that some local elites understood these acts as moral transgressions. When Fregoli visited the city of Córdoba in 1910, “he appeared dressed as a dancer with a big décolleté. People started shouting against indecency and immorality, and he was forced to abandon the city.”⁶³ Likewise, we know that these images work as figures for transgressive embodiments; by the mid-twentieth century many maricas and travestis were performing these acts in working-class bars and brothels.⁶⁴

The convergence between popular shows and the articles about those people allegedly simulating another sex produced vital information about gender embodiment. In 1910 the popular magazine *PBT* published instructions for practicing male transformismo. With photographs of a famous actress who transformed herself into an elegant man, they show how the performance demanded clothing and explained how to act as a man. The article emphasized the art of walking by comparing how men and women usually stand and pose their legs differently.⁶⁵ This guidance shows how transformismo became a legitimate platform that fostered knowledge of how transgressing gender rules may have unexpected uses.

The popularity of transformismo penetrated deep into popular culture, as for example with tango, the mainstream musical genre among working-class people. Since the end of the nineteenth century, doctors and intellectuals had expressed their concern about how this popular music associated with working-class life and

prostitution promoted deviant gender figures, for instance, by representing the characters of brothel madams and pimps as manly women and feminine men.⁶⁶ Tango played a role in popularizing representations of gender crossing. During the 1910s, Pepita Avellaneda (1874–1951) and Linda Thelma (1884–1939) portrayed figures that embodied a stereotypical lower-class masculinity during their tango shows.⁶⁷ Linda Thelma was famous in the worlds of both *coplas* (northern folk music) and tango. Even if some journalists criticized her for appropriating the figure of the gaucho to “ruin our popular poems” and accused her of being part of a “decadent” star system,⁶⁸ she became one of the most-requested performers in the world of variety shows.⁶⁹ From the 1920s the famous singer Azucena Maizani (1902–70), one of the first well-known women composers, usually performed in public dressed like a man, in a character known as La Ñata Gaucha.⁷⁰ Maizani’s album promotions portrayed her like other male tango singers, with hats and suits, and the press usually pointed out that she had a male haircut.⁷¹ Maizani’s repertoire had a flexible gender strategy in which she portrayed a man, and in one of her most famous songs, “Pero yo que sé” (1928), Maizani avoided revealing the gender of the singer, opening a space for male and female identification.⁷²

Elites’ anxieties were also transversal for a leftist culture that usually venerated masculinity as a motor of social transformation. Even if anarchists promoted gender equality and free love, and sometimes did not condemn sexual dissidence, representations of sexual deviation were important tools for defining internal hierarchies.⁷³ A good example is the anarchist author José Castillo’s play *Los invertidos* (1914), which was intended as propaganda to stress the degeneration of the elite. The play narrated the story of a doctor (Florez) with a double life, with his invert friends and his straight family. The show also made reference to one of the most famous female invertidos, La Princesa de Borbón, who, as I will show in the last section, became a popular myth of the transgression of gender frontiers. In the play the exposure of his secret forces the

doctor to commit suicide, an outcome that is presented as the tragic future that awaits all *invertidos*.⁷⁴

Cultural elites were aware that these discourses not only had a disciplinary dimension but also made available possible identifications of paths to gender transgression. Yarfitz points out that the Buenos Aires city authorities shut down the play under the belief that even the title alone was promoting vice. The show was performed only a few times under the title *Los anormales* (The Abnormal Ones) and quickly sold out.⁷⁵ In his defense of the prophylactic intention of the play, Castillo refers to the widespread knowledge about sexual inversion among ordinary people: “Does ‘The Inverts’ arise from an immoral idea? Does it inspire impure desire? Provoke sensual dissolution? No. It speaks to us of a vice that nobody doesn’t already know about and that the entire world is convinced exists. And in speaking to us, it shows this vice in its most pernicious aspect.”⁷⁶

Castillo was right: physicians did not have a monopoly on the conversation about everyday gender-transgressive practices. The languages of the working-class world also expressed traces of those experiences beyond gender and sexual norms. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the hybridization of immigrants and Indigenous people produced a rich popular sublanguage of Spanish called *Lunfardo*, with several references to sexual deviation.

As I previously analyzed with Jorge Luis Peralta, people used words such as *maricones*, *maricas*, *putos*, *invertidos*, *tortillera*, or *hombre-mujer/mujer-hombre* to define a spectrum of sexual attitudes and gender expressions.⁷⁷ The German ethnologist Robert Lehmann-Nitsche (1872–1938) wrote recollections of the oral popular language and jokes. He recorded a major collection of popular erotic references in the early twentieth century. While people used this terminology to define every man who was penetrated in a sexual act by others, *Lunfardo* dictionaries add a particular gender dimension to this that could be associated with the experiences of those people. People could associate effeminate sexual inversion—particularly those penetrated in the sexual act—with

words referring to their gender fluidity with mockery, using words such as *Manflorita/Manfloro/Manflora*, a deformation of *hermafrodita* that exalted how these characters expressed fluid male and female features beyond the binary male/female, defined as an “effeminate man who wants to look like a woman and dresses and behaves as if he were one.”⁷⁸ Other similar terms defined this idea about how sexual inversion was related to a corporeal and spiritual duality: a gendered body experience. For example, the phrase “varones de ambos sesos” (men with both brains; *sesos* could also sound like *sexos*) refers to someone’s alleged dual sexes and brains.⁷⁹ Another example is the word *mino*, a masculinization of *mina*, a popular slang word for “woman.”⁸⁰

In summary, in their more creative or disciplinary expressions, doctors, working-class people, journalists, and artists participated in social exploration of the limits of the body and the frontiers of gender belonging. However, even if it was expected for these boundaries to align with people’s behavior, some stories show how people transgressing gender rules tried to negotiate and retain their sovereignty over their bodies.

In the Body: Negotiating the Boundaries of “Sex”

The debates and everyday struggle to define the limits of gender-belonging were central to the formulation of citizenship as a status inseparable from the body. Even if the agents of science and law tried to reduce people who transgressed gender frontiers to objects of science, people also negotiated their gender-belonging from below. In the case of female-to-male gender transgressions, the articulation of efficient male embodiment allowed them access to citizenship, understood here beyond its legal assertion of a broader political sense of belonging. In this section I explore how different people negotiated their sovereignty over their bodies with agents of science and the state. By reinforcing, adapting, or rejecting dominant languages, certain people experimented with the limits of their gender-belonging by deploying multiple practices and technologies.

In 1904 the prestigious medical journal *La semana médica* published Carlos Roche's doctoral dissertation, in which he gathered several cases of people living with an allegedly artificial sex. Between 1900 and 1904, Roche worked at the gynecology department of the Hospital Francés (French Hospital), in Buenos Aires, where he collected stories, letters, and testimonies of those who lived between what they understood as the "two true sexes."⁸¹ Roche describes that in 1904, Catalina Espil visited Dr. Jorge Laure's office at the French Hospital. She was a twenty-three-year-old French maid who had been raised by a single mother. After her birth in Paris, a doctor pointed out to her mother that the child had some "male genital elements" and no uterus. Following the doctor's advice, her mother decided to migrate to Argentina in order to give her daughter a new life and to get her legal papers as a girl.⁸² Catalina was raised as a girl. She arrived in Buenos Aires when she was three years old. At age six she entered a girls' school, and as a teenager she trained for one year to become a teacher. However, she could not finish her studies. When she turned fourteen, her mother sent her to a farm outside the city to avoid punishment for her unexpected bodily changes. In contrast with other girls her age, Catalina noticed that she did not have her period and that her body was not changing as expected. Catalina started shaving her facial hair and using cloths to reinforce her female figure. When she was eighteen years old, she moved back to the city and began working as a maid for a rich family. Some months later she got a job as a maid in the maternity ward of the French Hospital, which fostered her interest in visiting a doctor.⁸³

Catalina's story is helpful for understanding that more than an abstract cultural production, medical hierarchies were experienced through the body. Doctors experimented and practiced with their patients to force them to internalize social rules. After some days experiencing pain when urinating, Catalina visited Dr. Laure. Her "deep voice" caught the doctor's attention. He called her a liar for hiding her "true sex" with female clothes. After a genital examination, he defined Catalina as a man with "a 3 and 1/2 cm flaccid penis that reaches 6 cm, and a glans the size of an eight-year-

old boy's" and pointed out that Catalina had a prostate and no female internal reproductive organs. Moreover, Laure argued that Catalina's pain was caused by a terrible tumor. He added that Catalina's female appearance was confusing: he described her as a man with "virile aspect softened by long hair." During that period doctors used invasive practices to embody binary sex, which included, for example, early mutilating surgeries on "hermaphrodite" children's genitalia.⁸⁴ While Catalina had not been submitted to such surgery during her childhood, Dr. Laure intended to operate on her to "correct" her "sex."

Patients' bodies were not passive spaces for science. Even beyond the intentions of doctors, patients like Catalina had an active role in scientific-knowledge production and sometimes openly rejected doctors' statements. When Laure stated in his report that Catalina was a pathological liar, she felt ashamed and upset with his decision. When he told her that she was not a woman, she "stayed mute" and "covered her face, overwhelmed." Like the emotionless expression of the Indigenous woman in Faussone's pictures, the traces of stillness or outrage seem to be symptoms of discomfort with the medical invasion of the lives of inverts or *hermafroditas*.⁸⁵

Doctors used the concept hermaphrodite to label people with various anatomical conditions that didn't fit their binary notion of sex.⁸⁶ The intervention over those bodies that were considered "mistakes" of nature in need of correction is an excellent example of how bodies were living laboratories for the formation of the nation and citizenship. Doctors understood that it was their duty to align those bodies to an alleged nature that allowed them to develop their full reproductive potentials as citizens of the nation. From the late nineteenth century, Argentine physicians practiced surgeries to define intersexual bodies into a binary conception of sex. By studying these bodies, doctors participated in shaping ideas of sexual normality. Argentine doctors promoted an evolutive conception of intersexuality in which subjects had to go through diverse stages to reach sexual differentiation. They understood *hermafroditas* as subjects that needed medical help to finish this process. During the

twentieth century, the progressive influence of eugenics perspectives—such as Pende’s Italian biotypology from the 1920s and the Spanish doctor Marañón’s intersexual theory—introduced new ideas of intersexuality and, along with them, surgeries that promoted the use of hormones to normalize those bodies considered abnormal.⁸⁷ In this book I bring intersex lives to the history of transness because both speak of the shifting experiences of transgressing gender. Following Gill-Peterson, the experimentation with both trans and intersex bodies was central to the making of medical and social notions of gender and sexuality. Likewise during those years, both inverters and the so-called hermaphrodites were seen as people crossing gender frontiers (even if, as we see in Juan’s case below, a few hermaphrodites’ gender transgressions were socially accepted).⁸⁸

Catalina’s strong resistance also appears to be a clear sign of how previous approaches based on ideas such as simulation or parody can be a total misreading of some people’s lives. Laure was surprised that Catalina was calm:

Regarding the mistake that had been made in declaring him a woman, he does not complain or protest, on the contrary, he seems resolved to persist. He assures us that he has never doubted being a woman, he thinks that his anomaly appeared during his stay in the Maternity Hospital where he claims to have read something in books about it.⁸⁹

After being classified as a man, Catalina begged not to be transferred to a men’s hospital ward, which the doctor respected but added, “Notwithstanding his true sex [Catalina] is placed in a women’s ward.”⁹⁰ The shame that she showed was an expression of Catalina’s self-perception as a woman and her feeling that being catalogued as a man meant the destruction of a self-image that she had worked her whole life to build.

This story contributes to what I pointed to in the first section: gender embodiment did not always converge with heteronormative sexual desire. Even if cases such as that of Catalina were not always common in doctors’ journals, they call our attention to how placing embodied experiences in the historical narrative can encourage

queer history to formulate new questions about the early twentieth century. Catalina had sexual encounters with women, and she stated that she had been having erections and wet dreams since she was sixteen. Dr. Laure understood this as a symptom of her “true sex,” even if others of Catalina’s friends declared to the doctor that she also dated a “good man.” Doctors understood that what we call today sexual orientation and gender expression were part of the same “nature,” and for that reason invertidos were defined as people with inverted sexual nature. It is difficult to say whether Catalina was able to separate these two elements to define herself, but we know that by maintaining a relationship with a woman and delaying her visit to the doctor, and in view of her resistance to being classified as a man, she did not align her sexual desire and gender embodiment with what was medically and socially expected.⁹¹ Medical power usually prevailed over the patients after death. Catalina’s tumor killed her, and after her death, the doctor classified her body as male. This was a final decision with which the doctor bent Catalina’s will, an act repeated in other stories collected by Roche.

While medical literature usually focused on what the elites understood as the inversion of male homosexuals, the transitions from female to male embodiment created other concerns, because they considered men to be key actors of national modernization, which was expressed in differential access to civil and political rights. Likewise, because doctors believed that sex was a naturally binary condition, they tried to avoid its transgression and actively participated in affirming a gender different from that which was socially assigned when they understood it to be mistaken. However, even historians could read this as a normative intervention of medicine; it is possible that for people looking to affirm a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth, engaging and adapting medical theories could help make sense of their experience. In 1904 a young teacher came to Dr. Pedro Caride’s office at the Hospital Francés. He was looking for a solution to what he considered the great suffering of his life: even though he was legally identified as a woman, he recognized himself to be a frustrated man

as a consequence of an alleged mistake by a midwife. Juan asked for medical help to recover a “sex” that had been denied to him.⁹² When he was born, he had been classified as a *hermafrodita*, so the midwife suggested that the parents raise him as a woman to prevent future suffering.

My review of the legal trials initiated for name changes in the first half of the twentieth century in the Province of Buenos Aires reveals dozens of people who, after being mistakenly registered at birth, asked to have their name changed, usually when they reached the legal age of majority, between eighteen and twenty-one years old. Most of these mistakes were related to their ethnic background, which produced bureaucratic errors in their birth certificates. Therefore, it is possible that gender embodiment did not always require legal documentation so that someone could be recognized as male or female. Instead, there were multiple practices with which people could negotiate broader inscriptions of gender embodiment. Moreover, these trials are eloquent expressions of how personal documents were central to everyday life and how gender embodiment also relied on broader mechanisms of social recognition.⁹³

The medical conception of *hermafroditismo* allowed Juan to negotiate a medical transition to his desired masculinity. Juan wrote a letter to Caride to explain why he needed to be fully recognized as a man, then reproduced Roche’s study. He believed in the potency of science. Some years before, he had visited a well-known doctor promoted by the press, but the specialist told him that his only chance was to be treated abroad. After this Juan said that he considered committing suicide. He stated:

The first doctor that I consulted, the one who presents himself in the Capital of the Republic’s newspapers, threw me out without conducting a medical examination and told me that only in Europe or the United States would I find someone able to cure me. He insisted that I don’t look for it here. What hope is there for the poor who live only in their own country?⁹⁴

A trip abroad was impossible on a teacher’s income, but he did not give up. In the end, Juan’s struggle was worth it; after a medical

examination found that a penis was located behind two bulges (“vaginal lips”), a hospital team decided to practice surgery to restore his “normal genitalia.” After a long process, supported by the hospital, he obtained a civil sex change, the modification of his title from female to male teacher, and finally, he married his girlfriend.⁹⁵

Juan’s letter gives insights into how the idea of having an inverted spirit was productive among those struggling to have their gender recognized, which in his case converged with an alleged medical pathology. He described the pain of living in a “false costume jail” made of female clothes, doll games, and strict parental limits to activities considered inappropriate for girls. He said that after the midwife’s decision, “without any meditation, they forced me to dress in female clothes to incorporate me into social life.” Juan did not blame his parents for his upbringing; he believed that they were trying to save him from the frustration of not being socially accepted as a man. In his own words, they protected him from “that group of young men who, in their lack of modesty and in the dissipation typical of their sex and age, know each other’s most precious secrets and give themselves spicy nicknames”—a description of how male groups of the period regulated and punished those who did not fit within their norms.

Juan distinguished “sex,” which he felt was imposed on him, from an attempt to recover sovereignty over his body in order to become a full citizen. He wrote that his true sex had been trying to flourish for his whole life. While he was a child, he rejected spending time with his sister, playing games that he considered boring; he preferred to climb trees or ride horses, things that were not allowed due to the “the expected female weakness,” as was expressed in some magazines that alerted parents to the risks of allowing girls to exercise their strength, rather than making them practice upright and coquettish walking.⁹⁶

Even if doctors believed in the centrality of genitalia to define sex, Juan’s case shows the coexistence of multiple medical and social conceptions of sex. The details about gestures, body shapes, and sexual desire expanded the medical conception of “sex.” Caride wrote

that Juan “uses female clothes without any elegance,” adding that he had a medium-sized body and mustache or facial hair, but that he had a “very deep and strong voice that reminds us of his true sex.” Caride also noticed that Juan was “too vigorous to be a woman” and had small breasts, and also attached a photograph to prove his genitality: a penis emerging between his “vaginal labia.” The medical description continued: “The pubis is covered by fat similar to a mons veneris, but I am sure that it is a penis without perforation of 7 cm, that can be transformed into an organ according to his true sex.” Juan and Caride understood his sexual desire as an emanation of his deep male nature, which he could fix with “reconstructive surgery” that he would perform assisted by two other surgeons. Juan wrote: “It is true that women are not irrelevant to me, and that I am charmed by female beauty and grace, but is not the passion that one is not allowed to enjoy a torment?” Caride explained that Juan’s anxiety to become a man was driven by his desire to marry a woman, which had left Juan exposed to accusations of being a lesbian, and some of his friends abandoned him for fear of social punishment.⁹⁷

In her study of trans male husbands in rural America of the late nineteenth century, Emily Skidmore pointed out how trans masculine experience created paradoxes in the construction of citizenship. On the one hand, trans men used multiple practices to access social prerogatives restricted to men. On the other hand, even if these actions denaturalized the fiction with which the state and society recognized people’s gender roles, trans masculinity was also required to legitimate the acceptable ways of being men in this period.⁹⁸ In fact, in contrast to other cases of people who were considered “uncivilized,” Juan’s request to set his sex free was part of his incarnation as a “good citizen”: he sent a letter and asked for help from science. The right to be a man was not a minor one. Argentine elites believed in the centrality of policing the male body as a vital actor in the development of the nation, the strategic subject for populating the country with healthy workers. Likewise, recognition as a man meant broader legal and political rights. Until 1918 Argentine women were considered legal minors. They had restricted

political rights until 1947 and were not granted full civil rights until 1968.⁹⁹

Because citizenship was inseparable from one's body, and its recognition as male provided a wide range of social privileges, the body was also the terrain for defining citizenship's limits. Juan's views about why and how he was a man inform us of how men experienced male citizenship physically. Juan did not restrict his idea to politics; he understood that being a male citizen included public and private practices considered acceptable for men. Juan wrote that he had expressed his discomfort with his "false sex" via the ideas of the "modernism and liberalism that I have struggled for, my fight against the irrational uses of women that I was subjected to." Nevertheless, even though "some people expressed their support for my ideas, there were more of those who were not genuine, and even though I felt the gossip whip my back I have always followed the path encouraged by a strength that I am not able to explain." Maybe Juan's "liberal criticisms" of the social restrictions placed on women's individual development were similar to those promoted by the first feminist publications.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, Juan progressively abandoned his claim for women's freedom. He thought that these "modernist and liberal ideas" were the expression of his "true sex," which was trying to flourish. His desire to get married to his girlfriend, to be able to exercise his citizenship, and to fully participate in public life, converged with his "nature" as a complete man. The surgery promised to set free his penis and his spirit. He wrote excitedly about the possibility of his full recognition: "Is it not preferable to put up with a diet far away from the coveted stew? If I can get my full genital potency, how can a man who feels himself as a true man give up his prerogatives and rights that are infinitely wider than the ones that a woman can obtain clandestinely? How could he give up something that he can enjoy legally and freely open to his social world?" As noted, surgery was the first step. Then, with the help of the doctor, Juan changed his legal identity papers and became a husband in order to be a full Argentine citizen.

Focusing on citizenship as an embodied experience and expanding it to all the mechanisms with which someone defined their belonging to a community allows us to analyze a wide range of practices with which people negotiated recognition from below. [Figure 1.3](#) is the image affixed to Raúl Luis Suárez's identity card. His hair is neatly combed, and he is wearing a tie and jacket. His clothing is no more and no less than what is expected of a man of his social position: Raúl works at the customs office. He slips a slight smile into the photograph, something totally unexpected for a public document in which subjects are required to stay emotionless. However, perhaps he expresses a little joy: the photograph in the document seals a pact with the state. Raúl is a citizen of the Argentine Republic, as would be recognized until his death in 1930.



Figure 1.3. Raúl Luis Suárez, identity card photograph. National General Archive (Argentina). Photography department. *Caras y caretas* collection. Code: AR-AGN-CYCo1-sff-406425, 265, 406425.

The spectacularization of Raúl's life was unprecedented: the media posted an article daily for at least a month, renowned figures of the time were consulted about the case, and a newspaper even published a series of fictional comics about his life. His case shows the central role of gender-transgressive bodies in shaping public debates about the limits of gender belonging. After medical intervention defined that his "true sex" had been socially changed, he was renamed with

the name that his parents had given him at birth: Raquel Suárez. The scandal in the press was inevitable; his name would be added to the long list of those who were called the “women-men,” a denigrative concept used in that time to define what nowadays we would describe as trans men.¹⁰¹

Raúl Luis Suárez was born in 1882 in La Coruña (Spain).¹⁰² His parents were the baker Modesto Suárez and the dressmaker Isidora Valdez. They migrated to Durazno (Uruguay) in 1886 with their daughters Raquel and Ada Francisca. Some years later they moved to La Plata, Argentina.¹⁰³ After Raúl’s father died, the family moved to Buenos Aires, where his mother worked as a housecleaner until her death in 1895. Because of the multiple narratives that circulated in the press, there are several versions of how Raquel and her sister ended up in a religious orphanage. Raquel escaped from the orphanage and survived many years in poverty until the age of twenty-two, when she was able to claim her younger sister. The two worked as dressmakers, a job popular among women that was economically precarious.

Journalists circulated different versions about how Raquel became Raúl. Some of them explained the effects of a life in poverty, saying that he was looking for better opportunities in the labor market; others defined it as a tactic employed to seek sexual encounters with women. In 1908, after Ada got married, Raquel traveled to Montevideo and forged his birth certificate to be fully recognized as Raúl Luis Suárez. Between 1908 and 1912, Raúl got his citizenship card in Argentina. In 1912 Raúl married Amalia Gómez, and some months later he moved in with another lover called Matilde. He became quite well known in his neighborhood in Buenos Aires for flirting with women. He got a job in the customs office and participated in the world of male socializing. Nevertheless, his life as a man reached a limit. In 1930 he fainted and was hospitalized. The doctors were surprised that he did not have the genitalia that they expected to see under his suit. Raúl went back home, and two days later he suffered an uncontrollable attack of emotional distress and died. Based on the neighbors’ gossip, some journalists accused

Matilde of poisoning and killing him, and of selling the household furniture in order to flee. In fact, Matilde was a fugitive for some days until the doctors confirmed that Raúl had not been poisoned.¹⁰⁴ That is how the story of Raúl flooded the newspapers.

Raul's life stresses both dimensions of the notion of living laboratories. First is the disciplinary one: the public spectacle of medical and political intervention over his body was a scenario to produce the alignment between bodies, gender, and citizenship. The second, more creative laboratory is the one in which Raul's agency over public documents, clothing, photography, and social interaction affirmed his male life. As [figure 1.4](#) shows, after his death Raul's body became a battlefield. Under a court order, an autopsy was carried out, and for weeks the story flooded the pages of the main Buenos Aires tabloids. A group of doctors, among whom was Pedro Caride, the same specialist who intervened in Juan's case, removed Raúl's organs, his mammary glands, and his brain. Their hunt for Raúl's "true sex" forced them to dismember his body in search of a "disease" that would explain why he had been able to live his life as a man. A few weeks after his death, their verdict was clear: "She is a perfect woman." The press described Raul's body in detail, describing him as a "thick woman, with developed hips, and bulging breasts."¹⁰⁵ Some journalists were shocked: "How did he usurp the civil rights of a man for twenty-three years?"¹⁰⁶ One theory floated was that the real Raúl had been murdered and that this was nothing more than a criminal plot to claim his property. One journalist asked his readers, "How did he create his voice, his new way of being, how did he create this new character?"¹⁰⁷



Figure 1.4. Illustration of physicians performing an autopsy on Raúl's corpse. *Crítica*, April 3, 1930, 4.

The case became a public debate in the tabloid newspapers, which published comic strips and articles for weeks. This shows how gender transgression was central to a broader discussion about urban transformation, modernization, and citizenship in a context of increasing feminist suffragette struggle. Nerio Rojas, an influential doctor and future Parliament member for the Radical Civic Union, explicitly associated the case with the feminist critique of traditional

values. He made an open call to restrict this type of transformation, which could undermine the infrastructure of legal sex. The doctor Julieta Lantieri—the face of the women’s suffrage struggle—endorsed other doctors’ opinions that Raúl was an expression of sexual deviation. The writer Alfonsina Storni understood Raúl’s actions as a strategic transformation to access the rights denied to women.¹⁰⁸ However, the most surprising opinion came from Susy Ortiz—a journalist from the tabloid *Última hora*—who openly defended Raúl’s right to be a man. This article is one of the first traces of the genealogy of a feminist discourse that openly recognized people’s sovereignty over their gender. In her text Ortiz refers to Raúl by his name and with male pronouns. She defined him as a “revolutionary emancipated from the absurd logic of nature” and as an example of “liberation.” She openly defended his right to be a male citizen: “If he had been able to choose, the male sex would have gained a good citizen.”¹⁰⁹

Raúl’s personal photography shows how this technology was vital for affirming gender belonging. Photography was how the body was placed in the struggle for defining social belonging with different audiences; it could be used to reaffirm one’s self-image with friends or seal a document certifying one’s gender, or it could use the press to undermine gendered social recognition. By this I mean that photographs act as technologies of embodiment with different powers depending on their contexts. In contrast with the pictures of the Indigenous body at the beginning of the chapter, Raúl’s portraits—like many others in the *CyC* collection of the National Archive, where I found him—show a pronounced emotional contrast between images produced by force and those used by people to affirm their gender. If we think of photography as an exercise of citizenry, the contrast is even more clear: the pictures of the Indigenous female person seek to negate her right to self-perception, while Raúl’s affirm his right to persist through time as a man.¹¹⁰ Coleman shows how photographs allow us to imagine all those pictures that were not preserved in traditional archives. Raúl’s portraits open our imagination to all those portraits that we will never see—and that

maybe we should not see—because their power relies on their intimate nature with which many people forged the right over their own body image, in their own terms.



Figure 1.5. Raúl Luis Suárez in his office. National General Archive (Argentina). Photography Department. *Caras y caretas* collection. Code: AR-AGN-CYCo1-sff-406425, 265, 406425.

In [figure 1.4](#), the legal picture of Raúl is the reference for legal recognition, the proof of a document that made him a legal man despite his genitalia. Its power is connected with the state's mechanism for producing citizens; it was the document that enabled

Raúl to marry and to have a good government position in the civil service. Moreover, his belonging went beyond legal recognition. The self-portrait in his office taken in 1925 (figure 1.5) was the perfect dominant manly representation of the period. His crossed legs, straight posture, smile, use of a cigarette, and elegant clothes reaffirmed his manly embodiment. Furthermore, other photographs in which he is with his colleagues also reaffirm his acceptance as a man by his coworkers, his participation in a growing middle-upper class of civil servants. The photograph's references to spaces of public power could be part of Raúl's strategy to guarantee his social and legal right to be a man. In contrast, during those years and, in at least one case, decades after his death, journalists published photographs of Raúl dressed as a woman in order to put a limit on his male interpretation and to recenter his memory as a woman.¹¹¹ One journalist described a seemingly minor detail about Raúl's body: his ears were pierced, which he considered a sign of "his place in the world, along with those of her sex."¹¹² Ear piercing was a widespread technique that parents used to encourage their daughters to embody their gender. In Raúl's portraits his pierced ears are imperceptible. The impossibility of finding this detail was perhaps a fortuitous coincidence or a careful detail with which Raúl guaranteed the effectiveness of his male embodiment.

The last dimension of the experience of alignment between body, gender, and citizenship comes after death. The state deployed multiple archival practices to reproduce its social order. Raúl's body was archived. The National General Archive filed him—along with other women-men—in a collection titled "Ladies Portraits." The archive is ruthless in preserving categories over time. Raúl's male embodiment was forcibly placed by archivists in a category that does not necessarily express his desire to live as a man, and that also tell us about the legacies of vernacular language of sexual sciences of the early century in the archive, as well as how the state extended its sovereignty over sex. On the other hand, Juan's letter was transcribed in a doctor's thesis that described him as a male subject, a contrast that helps us also understand the different level of

precariousness of this recognition, and the power of medical intervention to preserve or erase this gendered embodiment over time. However, in this aftermath, in which doctors and the state regulated Raúl's legacies, his partner negotiated his social recognition privately beyond the power of the state. According to a chronicle, after the autopsy Raúl's body was buried in male underwear, and the photograph of his gravesite shows the inscription "Raúl Luis Suárez, 1930."¹¹³

Thinking of male embodiment and citizenship from below helps us understand those practices connected with mobility and social class that made it possible for some people to achieve broader social privileges. In 1962 a journalist published references to articles of 1914 about *La machito*, who was the leader of a gang of criminals who conducted numerous robberies. Although he had been called Adelina Bejarano, he "was of the third sex, as is often said of those people who, feeling like men, transform themselves into men or vice versa."¹¹⁴ The press claimed that he "was the first woman in Buenos Aires to wear trousers." A journalist noted, "For fear of being misinterpreted he exaggerated the male characteristics," which included appearing with women in public, drinking, and adopting violent attitudes.¹¹⁵ *La machito*, like Raúl, showed that the exaltation of material repertoires, such as smoking, drinking, and clothing, were generally accompanied by a strong romantic performance with which they entered the stage of competition with other men.¹¹⁶

Other people used migration as an attempt to negotiate their gender recognition. In 1905, Arturo, a Brazilian migrant aged twenty-two, was imprisoned in La Pampa province, where he worked in agriculture and railroad construction. He was accused by the police of simulating a "false sex" and was forced to return to women's clothing.¹¹⁷ Similar stories describe the role of clothing and gestures to avoid being caught by policemen in public spaces. In 1907 a young rural worker was imprisoned in a train station in Buenos Aires after a long trip from Patagonia. The police officer suspected that even though he was wearing wide trousers and a big hat to cover his face, the man walked a bit like a woman. After imprisonment the worker

explained that he was a Spanish migrant who lived as a man in order to work in rural areas, and that even if his colleagues knew about it, they respected his decision. Although it is difficult to know to what extent this practice was a strategic gender embodiment aimed at getting better jobs or whether the description was an excuse to avoid conflicts with the police, the fact is that it was effective enough.¹¹⁸

These stories show how different people engaged with the dominant narrative of both the binary male/female and narratives of gender transgression to negotiate sovereignty over their bodies. These diverse histories also show how invisibility was usually vital to achieving the recognition of the desired sex and how the articulation of geographical mobility, economic resources, and sometimes medical support made a difference in affirming one's gender. By expanding our understanding of citizenship as an everyday embodied and practical experience, we explore the multiple ways in which people transgressing gender frontiers achieved social recognition. Even if paradoxical, the same secret that erased these people from the historical narrative (until found by the press) was, for many of them, the best weapon to survive.

The Spectacular Making of Sex

As I point out in the first section, this book offers an alternative reading of sexual inversion. Thinking about gender embodiment before the legislation against people dressing in “clothes of the opposite sex” was enacted means exploring against what this legislation was working to achieve and how to transform it. I am interested in how these people participated in public life and, by doing so, how they interpreted dominant gender culture. This is not to say that inverts were socially accepted. As Pablo Ben points out, the influence of liberalism has contributed to decriminalizing sexual practices between consenting adults in private since the late nineteenth century. However, this was followed by giving the police power to punish public displays of sexual and gender dissidence. Even if the legislation started in the 1930s, inverts usually faced conflict with police officers and civil violence.¹¹⁹ This section studies

the particularities of a subculture in which spectacularity played a vital role in the construction of gendered corporealities. While the last section shows how passing helped many people achieve sovereignty over their bodies, this one focuses on the role of public experimentation in body feminization. Paradoxically, this section shows how cultural elites reacted to this hypervisibilization by banning practices of sexual inversion.

Turning attention from sexual desire to the body helps us interpret how gender-variant people understood and embodied gender. Aida—one of the cases studies by de Veyga—was born in Buenos Aires at the end of the nineteenth century. She grew up in an upper-income family, and from an early age she rejected being treated as a man. When she turned twenty, she found employment in an administrative position in the Casa Rosada (house of the government), where she met an older man who, some time later, became her partner. De Veyga defined her as an “imitator of an honest woman,” maybe because in contrast with other *invertido* profiles published by doctors, Aida did not underscore her sexual appetites. She defined herself as a “female spirit created for men’s love.”¹²⁰

As with Juan, her embodiment highlighted values expected of a woman of her social class, such as not having sex with her partner until she got “married.” Marriage rituals (*maridaje*) had been quite popular among *maricas* and *travestis* during the twentieth century, who used them to legitimize unions in some social spheres outside of legal recognition.¹²¹ At her wedding Aida wore “a white dress, and her hair was adorned with orange blossoms,” while “the groom (had) a frock coat and white gloves.” The couple lived together for a year, and after some fights they broke up. Aida got married again some months later to a second husband, a man with two children, with whom she lived for six months until she died from tuberculosis. Between the first and the second marriage, Aida defined herself as a widow. She had a time of mourning without meeting any other men.¹²²

These rituals, restricted for a specific audience, speak of the primacy the gendered body mediated by binary languages of sex. Even if not legal, this form of marriage was a union in which at least one of the two people was socially considered to be a male heterosexual who played the “man’s role” as penetrator in the relationship.¹²³ Inverts defined their sexual partners as *bufa/o* or *chongos*. *Bufa/o* was a deformation of *bufarrón*, a word used to describe subjects who played the role of penetrators in the sexual encounters and identified themselves as heterosexuals.¹²⁴ During the colonial era, *chongo* had been used by enslavers to define robust enslaved people in good physical condition. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it became a popular term for apprentice bricklayers. From the 1920s onward, homosexuals used the word to define virile heterosexual men who had sex with other men in the role of the penetrator. In the late twentieth century, travestis defined a chongo as a heterosexual male who has sexual and affectionate relationships with travestis.¹²⁵

Aida’s case story was part of the genre of *invertidos’* autobiographies, which were common in medical and cheap literature and which included other stories translated from foreign periodicals.¹²⁶ In addition to autobiographies, letters, plays, and poems, doctors and journalists published photographic portraits. As I said in the last section, portraits also reflect the gendered language with which subjects make sense of their experiences of embodiment, showing the details of the broader pleasures of expressing oneself. For Aida and her peers, portraits were a means to achieve power over personal narration. One might imagine that producing these pictures was not easy, because Aida did not have Raúl’s social recognition. Taking a portrait required finding a photographer committed to taking it; wearing the best dresses, a pretty hairstyle, and makeup; and choosing an excellent background to make the image last over time. Small gestures such as the hands on the hips, the stretched dress, and the strict gaze into the camera were part of the period’s traditional composition of female figures. These pictures could be

circulated among friends, lovers, and, for those selling sex, clients, or could just be a personal treasure.

Figure 1.6 shows some details of the broader pleasures of expressing oneself. As Aida possibly does in the portrait, invertidos usually used corsets to exalt the female figure. Even as doctors increasingly expressed their concern about the harms of this intimate clothing, corsets had been very popular among women since the end of the nineteenth century.¹²⁷ This item of clothing allowed them to refine the hip and exaggerate their breasts, which at the beginning of the twentieth century was understood as a challenge to the social demand for women's domesticity and a sign of female incursion into public space.¹²⁸ However, while the use of corsets tended to be unpopular among women by the beginning of the 1920s, the photographs help me imagine that invertos continued using them to maximize their female features.



Figure 1.6. Aida's portrait. F. de Veyga (1902). Invertido sexual imitando a una mujer honesta. *Archivo de criminología y medicina legal y psiquiatría*. Book I, 368.

In this period inverts became popular villains of the Latin American urban metropolis. Journalists around the region highlighted the visibility of “men dressed as women” in Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, and Buenos Aires.¹²⁹ The extended concern about their presence became a prelude to the attempt to expel them from the public sphere in the context of the crisis of the liberal project in the 1930s and the legitimation of the need of state intervention to build the social order. Inverts' spectacular and scandalous appropriation of public life shows the conflictive ways in

which they affirmed their effeminate expression in public, negotiating certain degrees of recognition and violence. One example is *La Teresita*, who was a famous *cocoto* in South American cities. *Cocoto* was a label used for men and “dressed women” who sold sex, usually related with cisgender sex workers. Deported from Buenos Aires, Chile, and Bolivia, La Teresita migrated to Spain in 1911. In his study of the lower classes of Barcelona, the journalist Marcos Bembo described her as a thirty-year-old *cocoto*, the daughter of a merchant, and a

quite feminine and not-bad looking guy who dresses as a woman and uses elegant clothes; he has conquered many [people in the Americas], receiving many presents. That is the way he made enough money to live in the capital in total luxury. Every night he traveled the city in a carriage with his more desperate partners [. . .] He is a scandalous sodomite, in Chile, he created a political crisis because many members of the government have had sexual relations with him.¹³⁰

In Buenos Aires “he moved to an expensive home in Belgrano Street, he organized big parties, which he attended with feminine dresses of scandalous luxury.”¹³¹ Already in the late nineteenth century, the journalist Benigno Lugones pointed out that among prostitutes there was “a multitude of men” whom he considered transformed into women at their parties:

The same ballroom criticisms, the same whispers at a ball about so-and-so’s dress, so-and-so’s hairstyle, so-and-so’s boots, or so-and-so’s fan; all those furtive glances, those flirtations, rivalries, aids, stories, lies, satires, and invectives that take place in her salon are repeated at that dance, because there the passive pederast is transformed into a woman, and the greatest offence that could be done to him would be to give him his masculine name.¹³²

The journalist Juan José de Soiza Reilly wrote a long article about the “shadowy Buenos Aires” where there were “more than three thousand thieves dressed as women,” whom he described as “drug addicts, sick people, and youth with beautiful facial features.” Party organizers, owners of big collections of dresses, and quite a tight-knit gang of friends became well known through tabloids. For example,

La Princesa de Borbón became famous in the press as a thief, soothsayer, and singer in cabarets of the Southern Cone after being expelled from Argentina in 1911.¹³³ She had been born in Galicia (Spain) and migrated to Buenos Aires in 1899. She had “big black eyes and a feminine voice” and was famous for her love stories. One rumor circulated in the media that a Chilean man decided to commit suicide because La Princesa abandoned him. Journalists portrayed her as an intelligent criminal: she forged her documents and tried to get a pension as the widow of a soldier who died in the Paraguayan war.¹³⁴ Some journalists added that since he was a child, he had loved using female clothes and experiencing the “emotions of the weak sex.” The same newspapers described that she went on exile to Montevideo to seek a more “peaceful life”; however, there she dated a “jealous” man that usually beat her. Her lover wounded her with a knife, leaving her in a hospital, for which her friends in Buenos Aires expressed their concern.”¹³⁵

Inspired by queer theory of the 1990s, in his brilliant pioneer book Salessi read these scandalous interactions as parodies with which invertidos undermined the dominant notions of gender, minimizing the role of transgressive gender embodiment.¹³⁶ There is no doubt that invertidos knew about doctors’ theories and maybe even tried to challenge them. However, this preliminary reading risks projecting an overrationalization of their practices. Invertidos participated in a culture defined by a binary notion of sex. They articulated narratives and practices associated with femininity as part of a broader conception of gender and sexuality, expressing femininity and playing an alleged female role with their sexual partners, a balance that could change between them. A good example is La Bella Otero, who said, “I always believed myself to be a woman. I got married in Sevilla and had two children.” She was born in Madrid in 1885 and studied in a primary school in the Spanish capital. While working in the street selling chamomile, she had her first sexual encounter with a man. La Bella Otero took the name of a famous Spanish dancer popular in the South American theater circuits. She migrated to Buenos Aires in 1898 and was illiterate. For two years she worked in

domestic service and then started a career that combined singing, stealing, dancing, and selling sex. She was imprisoned thirty-four times and was even once sent to the archetypical Argentine prison: Ushuaia, in the southernmost city in the world. Eventually La Bella Otero died of tuberculosis.¹³⁷

In La Bella Otero's narrative, sexual desire played a key role in the construction of her identity. She did not use her penis to get pleasure; she performed oral sex and masturbation, and enjoyed being penetrated. She worked selling sex and, according to de Veyga, was particularly attracted to fat and hairy men. She told de Veyga that when she was really attracted to a man, she conserved his sperm inside her by not defecating, an image with which she exalted her figure as a potential pregnant mother. This portrayal was also present in a poem she gave de Veyga to publish:

From the *Buen Reito* to the *Alameda*
Crazy desires I came to get
Boys, have it hard
with my hand I will give you pleasure
with umbrella and rattles¹³⁸
And with a glove, I will give it to you
for your pleasure put it in my mouth
And if you feel uncomfortable with my mouth
and from the back you want to give it to me
don't be afraid, my *chinito*¹³⁹
I have no fold on my back
If you feel uncomfortable with my mouth
and want to love me from my back
don't be afraid, my *chinito*
you will soon cum.¹⁴⁰

Several examples point to the fact that inverts negotiated their female recognition in certain public spheres in which this deviation was tolerable or imperceptible. Journalists and doctors expressed their concern about inverts' active participation in public life, because they considered that inverts' gender transgression was a threat to a modern healthy society. Reilly describes many inverts who had passed as female in certain controlled interactions, such as

La Morosini, a singer in the National Theatre; la Chochicera, who danced in working-class cabarets; and La Rubia Petrolina, who worked as a *Llorona* (someone hired to cry in funerals). Dora and La Sirena usually attended high-society parties to steal from the participants.¹⁴¹



Figures 1.7 and 1.8. Invertidos sexuales flirting in the street with men. Soiza Reilly (1912). "Ladrones vestidos de mujer." *La escuela de pillos*. Buenos Aires/Montevideo: De Angelis. Ibero-American Institute of Berlin Digital Archive.

As figures 1.7 and 1.8 show, the spectacular female incursions into public spaces show that gender embodiment was relational and built by interaction with others. Their visible navigation into the city is a sign of the gendered codes that regulated inverts' interaction with men, but more broadly how they affirmed their femininity, transgressing social expectations and negotiating belonging. While experts of the time usually reduced these navigations of public spaces to erotic or criminal strategies, there may also have been in these adventures the pleasure of a spectacular female embodiment in public spaces. It is difficult to know how much their dress code responded to that used by sex workers or upper-class women; however, some evidence shows that attending parties of the elite had given them some freedom and permission to avoid punishment. Even between the 1920s and 1930s, female clothes showed more bodily flexibility, and young women started wearing clothes that clung to the body as the image of the modern girl. In this period inverts enhanced their femininity, showing a spectacular gender embodiment that could guarantee realness.¹⁴² Lunfardo has explicit references to the practices of the public incursion of maricas and inverts. For the criminologist Eusebio Gomez, *tirar la chancleta* (to throw off the sandal) defined the attitude of those who indulged publicly in debauchery without any "moral compunction."¹⁴³ The phrase was associated primarily with those prostitutes who were victims of pimping, who had to leave their footwear (*chancletas*) before going to the room with their client so that they could not escape. Reilly described *invertidos* using the word *plumiar* (plumage) to describe the feminine attitude in public avenues.¹⁴⁴ *Yirar/girar* (cruising) was also a popular concept in the world of sex workers, related to walking the streets in search of erotic encounters.¹⁴⁵

I interpret the reaction against *invertidos*' spectacular body construction as a symbol of a significant social transformation of sexual and gender understanding channeled by the state. It was the institutionalization of a broader social violence. Being in the street usually made inverts potential victims of male violence and social

practices to regulate the limits of gender belonging. For example, La Bella Otero described how she preferred to move in a coach to avoid incidents with pedestrians, who could sometimes attack her violently.¹⁴⁶ The socialist press warned working-class men to be aware of invertidos, who could hide a knife under their dresses to steal from them, and also explained that the carriage allowed them to run quickly from police officers.¹⁴⁷

The global economic crisis of 1929 drove a broader social, cultural, and political turmoil. The peripheral position of Argentina made the country vulnerable, affecting the international prices of agricultural goods and proto-industries. The crisis catalyzed disappointment with the Argentine modernization project: while (white European) immigration was considered essential for progress, the rapid growth of the urban population activated the elites' concerns. The economy stimulated the critics of those discourses, guided first by discourses on hygiene and then by eugenics, which criticized the effects of urban modernity, such as syndicalism, poverty, prostitution, or sexual deviation.¹⁴⁸ In this sense sexual policing is inseparable from the shifting imaginaries of Argentine whiteness. The emerging obsession with public morality and working-class sexuality was related to anxieties about the population's alleged healthy reproduction. I read the reaction against nonnormative and nonreproductive sexualities as expressing elites' anxieties about the alleged quality of the needed European whiteness to achieve their desired civilization.¹⁴⁹

In 1930 José Félix Uriburu led Argentina's first military coup, followed by a dictatorship against the elected president Hipólito Irigoyén after the nationalization of petrol production. The military regime initiated a decade of elections mired in fraud and social conflict. The government established its discourse on the need for a public moral and military role in reshaping its future by broader politics of state intervention over the economy and social life. In convergence with global discourses about public morality, the government inaugurated an unprecedented public intervention in the public sphere that would grow increasingly in Argentina among civil and military governments: the policy codes of public morality.

Photographs of invertidos walking in the street would become impossible, since the state empowered police to imprison them for public scandal in 1932. This legislation constituted a growing formalization of the sexual boundaries of citizenship. In the city of Buenos Aires, the police's legal code for moral control empowered police to imprison "those who display themselves in the public highway or public places dressed or disguised in the clothing of the opposite sex."¹⁵⁰

* * *

This chapter explores the experiences and portrayals of transgressive gender transitions in the early twentieth century. Examining gender flexibility in a context in which people understood sex as inflexible and binary helps us reconceptualize the limits of queer history and our understanding of nationhood, sex, and citizenship as broader embodied experiences.

Extending our historical imagination before the existence of modern sexual identities and the legal restrictions that expel transgressive gender expressions from public life provides us with insightful tools for reimagining queer history. This text argues for the necessity of moving from a perspective attached to sexual desire to one that places gender embodiment at the core, opening questions to reconstruct a more heterogeneous subworld in porous dialogue with mainstream culture.

Moreover, thinking of transgressive bodies as living laboratories of public fabrication of social hierarchies and individual experimentation reshapes our understanding of Argentine modernity through the lens of transness. The public portrayal of transgressive bodies transforms them into disciplinary laboratories for formulating racial and sexual boundaries. Even while unidirectional, usually contested, and negotiated, this comprehension helps us ground citizenship and nationhood, to think about the micro dimension of its formation as an everyday experience. Here we study citizenship not as an abstract discourse of the elite but as a practical living reality open to reinterpretation. Following these ideas, the concept of

laboratories also allows us to explore the creative ways people reinterpret dominant gendered culture, be it with spectacularity or a low profile. This study help us explore the multiple ways in which people transgressing boundaries negotiated their gender belonging from below.

CHAPTER 2

The Body I Was Born In

Governing Sex and Embodiment Repertoires during the Era of the Biomedical Transition



Figure 2.1. Así, February 20, 1963, 370. Archivos Desviados.

Liliana Vega was born in Buenos Aires in 1933. In an interview she described her life as a personal tragedy: she felt stuck in the body of a man, which she considered a mistake of nature. Like other gender-variant people of her generation, Liliana portrayed herself publicly as trapped in the body she was born in. In 1959, after reading an article about another Argentinian woman like her, María Fernanda, who had claimed legal recognition as a “full woman” after having surgery, Liliana decided to seek medical aid. Helped by the famous doctor Francisco Defazio—the first to perform these treatments in Argentina—Liliana underwent genital gender-affirmation surgery.¹ The postal workers’ trade union healthcare fund paid for the expensive treatment, and even though the state never provided her with female documents, she was recognized as a woman at work. Over the following years, Liliana became a popular figure in the press: she announced her marriage, highlighted her desire to become a mother, was photographed on the river in sensual swimsuits, and launched a South American tour with her singer boyfriend.²

Liliana was born in the same year in which the invert’s adventures in public spaces that I described before was undergoing profound change because of increasingly repressive state policies. This was a violent process that, along with the rapid transformations of a globally connected city like Buenos Aires, created an opening for new identity and body plasticity, including the consolidation of modern homosexuality.³ While homosexuals became more visible, the popularization of new technologies and the rise of mass consumption transformed the lives of those seeking a gender transition.

Liliana was part of a generation of people who built their bodies in a context of significant material and conceptual transitions. From the 1920s the international medical field became a battlefield for defining the notion of “sex,” which many physicians understood as a more complex multifactorial condition that couldn’t be reduced to genitalia. Inspired by emerging disciplines such as endocrinology, embryology, sexology, psychology, and medicine, well-established physicians expanded a notion that had previously been reduced to genitalia. The new attention to gonads and hormones, stimulated by

influential doctors such as the Spanish physician Gregorio Marañón, inspired doctors to consider that every subject had a dominant and a secondary sex.⁴ In this context the popular portrayal of people affirming their new gender reshaped these concepts. From the late 1950s onward, the global circulation of reports about sex-change treatments partially challenged the idea of an inflexible sex.⁵

Liliana also grew up in a country that was going through a significant transformation. From the 1930s economic crisis onward, market protectionist policies fostered the creation of new industries, which boosted internal migration from the provinces to the big cities. In 1945 the consolidation in power of Peronism—a social coalition led by Col. Juan Domingo Perón, which included trade unions, nationalists, Catholics, and social reformers—radically expanded the popular classes' consumer power by increasing working-class rights and wages.⁶ Peronism transformed the political landscape by challenging the old traditional social hierarchies, expanding the social recognition of political subjects who had usually been excluded from the political system by recognizing them as subjects of social rights in the context of an emergent mass society in which the media and consumption played a renewed influential role.⁷ Since the emergence of Peronism, government conflicts with conservative elites would open a dispute over the definition of Argentina's social, economic, and political model and, in particular, would determine the role of working-class people and popular classes in society.⁸ Starting with the military coup of 1955, and two subsequent coups against democratically elected governments, which led to the military dictatorships of 1966-73 and 1976-83, different military-political trends would attempt to eradicate Peronist influence and bring in significant reforms against working-class power. In terms of sexuality, the Peronist paradox is that while under Perón the state reinforced the mechanism for policing sexual dissidence in public spaces—especially during the period of high conflict with the Catholic Church (1954–55), its role in expanding the power of historically excluded peoples would make available new narratives of self-identification and conflicts taking place in the public sphere.⁹

This convergence of new medical discourses, the consumption boom, the expansion of the media, and new narratives about social justice would provide an inevitable context in which to consider the conflict over defining the nature of *sex change*.

During those years, gender-affirmation surgeries became a field of legal struggle in which trans people, scholars, judges, and doctors negotiated the limits of body transformations. The biomedical sex change opened up a fight to define the boundaries of state sovereignty over bodies and convened ideas of possible national futures. While the popularization of these stories was a vehicle for those seeking to affirm their gender, it also transformed this issue into a national debate that alarmed scholars and policy makers. From conservatives to social reformists, cultural elites imagined sexual encounters as a critical element of national development, and nonreproductive eroticism or genital transformation as a threat to the population of the country.¹⁰ The conservative specialist in law Carlos Ayarragaray expressed this feeling by calling on legislators “not to burn them [transsexuals] as in the past, but to liquidate them socially through the law, even if a few thousand pseudo-citizens are lost.”¹¹ The national debate about biomedical sex change became a platform for codifying new regulations to limit people’s sovereignty over their bodies and punish those seeking to transgress gender rules.

Unlike other countries in the hemisphere, where access to so-called sex change surgery was restricted but allowed under certain conditions from the 1960s onward (the United States) or existed in a legal vacuum (Chile and Mexico), the Argentinean state deployed restrictive legislation that banned this kind of surgery, making such procedures clandestine, expensive, and dangerous. From 1944 on, Decree No. 6216 prohibited any intervention that led to sterilization, and from 1967 on, Law No. 17132 prohibited surgeries that affected reproductive organs.¹² This law considered surgeries affecting reproductive organs to be mutilation that, according to article 91 of the Criminal Code, “would result in imprisonment of three to ten years if the injury caused a mental or physical illness that is certain

or probable to be incurable, permanent incapacity for work, loss of a sense, an organ, a limb, the use of an organ or limb, speech or the ability to engender or conceive.”¹³

This chapter analyzes gender embodiment during the transition to the mainstream biomedical notion of sex change. It explores the social trajectories, policing, and representation of gender embodiment between the invertidos’ world of the early twentieth century and travestis’ public culture in the 1970s. To this end the chapter works in three layers. The first layer examines media representations of gender transitions. When asked by the press, people described themselves as subjects trapped in the wrong body, even when they did not necessarily desire surgery. Although surgeries became a central topic in the media, far from offering an idea of body construction that found in medicine its theological metaphor, this chapter reconstructs the rich universe of objects—combs, forged documents, dresses, photography, and trousers—involved in the making of people’s repertoires of embodiment. These stories show the diversity of ways with which people built their bodies in a context in which doctors, judges, journalists, and policy makers were trying to stabilize a normative language to narrate gender transition. Likewise, this chapter studies how class identities played a role in shaping these repertoires. Economic opportunities were central to defining resources for embodiment: getting a prosthesis or paying for hormones or surgeries was an expensive endeavor. Moreover, class identities were effective boosters to specifying different male and female embodiments, for example, that of a working-class man, a merchant, a sex worker, or an upper-class woman. I decided to separate the analysis of male and female gender transitions in this chapter because they work with a different logic, and in this period the two groups did not participate together in a unique identity community.

The chapter’s second layer addresses the progressive medicalization of the popular representation of transforming one’s gender. It explores the struggles of policy makers, journalists, doctors, and judges to police a notion of sex that they understood as

out of control. The chapter shows how hypervisibilization—the public experimentation with gender-variant people’s stories—promoted new debates that would push the state progressively to affirm its ownership over all Argentines’ genitalia between 1944 and 1967, by considering reproductive organs a national good, untouchable for individual citizens. As I explain in the introduction, the association between sex, genitalia, and reproduction mobilized concerns about the state’s sovereignty over the population’s genitalia to guarantee human reproduction as a necessary condition of national development. This text explores the languages that organized the experience of those who—at least publicly—expressed that they were trapped in the incorrect body and how they tried to transform it.

The last layer analyzes a moment of encounter among powerful forces that struggled over people’s gender embodiment: medicine, state agents, and trans desire. While doctors experimented with the boundaries of the human body and sex, trans people struggled to shape their bodies by appropriating medical narratives and practices; state agents sought to regulate what they considered central to the nation: their citizens’ reproductive potency. This struggle led in 1967 to an explicit prohibition of any medical intervention that affected reproductive organs (including those of cisgender bodies). This was a breaking point in defining the limits of people’s sovereignty over their bodies.

The chapter is organized into three sections. First, it studies the transformation of the experiences and notions of gender transgression by focusing on male-to-female gender transitions. Second, the chapter explores the particularities of female-to-male gender transition during the same period, especially how people undergoing this process adapted the narrative of being trapped in the “wrong body.” The final section studies how the hypervisibilization of stories of medical transitions pushed the state to ban gender-affirmation practices.

The Fall of the Invertidos’ Eden: Female Gender Transgressions during the Era of the Biomedical

Transition

In the early twentieth century, some doctors had understood that invert^s tried to “change their sex” through an allegedly artificial external costume that expressed the inversion of their spiritual life. With the progressive impacts of medical discourses such as endocrinology, between the 1920s and the 1960s, both popular and medical cultures became a battlefield on which new ideas about sex mutated into a multifactorial conception that challenged the reduction of “sex” to genitals.¹⁴ The idea of gender transgression reduced to sexual inversion exploded, leaving space for other visible expressions of gender-variant people.

From the late 1940s onward, the increasing number of articles recounting gender-transition stories in the press spread a new scientific sexual language and called some doctors’ attention to surgeries and hormones. In Europe and the US, the expansions of gender biomedical treatments led to the introduction of the term *transsexualism* to medical language.

More than introducing a monolithic transition from a binary to a multifaceted explanation of what sex was, the twentieth century opened a conflict between doctors to define legitimate interpretations of bodies’ sexuality. Because there was not a general consensus, many of those doctors experimenting with body transformations were challenged by other physicians who insisted on the inflexibility of sex and considered those practices to be artificial transformations.

Ideas about sex and its plasticity circulated publicly. For more than half a century, social reformers, anarchists, socialists, and freethinkers popularized sexual sciences in their magazines. Journals such as *Hombre de América* and *Cultura sexual y física* offered cheap sexology courses for working-class and middle-class readers in which they promoted contraceptive methods and lessons on how to treat venereal diseases. The conversation about how hormones and surgeries could affect people’s mutable bodies made specialized medical magazines available for popular consumption. For example, during the 1940s in Rosario, one of the biggest cities in Argentina,

doctors such as Santiago Libarona Brian offered treatment for homosexual men trying to fit into the dominant heterosexual culture by introducing animal glands into their bodies to boost testosterone production in order to make them recover their “masculine sex,”¹⁵ treatments that continued to be popular in the following decades among those doctors trying to control the effeminate expression of sexual inverts.¹⁶ Some articles did not even reduce sex to genitalia and talked openly about chromosomes and hormones.¹⁷ For example, a piece in the popular health magazine *Viva cien años* (1948) asked its readers, “Can we change sex?” The article called attention to “humans with tricks,” defined as “people with a doubled sex” who could live a “false” life among others. Like North American magazines of the time, the journal reproduced stories about people pushing the limits of gender.¹⁸ The journalist focused on a Czechoslovak athlete who was treated with hormones and surgeries to become a woman. The article answered pessimistically: “Can science change humans’ sex? It is difficult to answer, but actually, no. It can only help someone who is hermaphrodite to get to their dominant sex.” This text presented a new definition of sex that considered that every person had a dominant and a secondary male or female sex determined by features such as hormones, chromosomes, internal reproductive organs, and genitalia.¹⁹

In 1944 the influential doctor José Belbey introduced the term *travestissement* to describe those who transitioned from one gender to another and expressed his concern about how many people were “seeking to change their sex.”²⁰ While the German concept was closer to the anglophone notion of transvestite, Belbey translated it as *travesti/transvestidos*, an influential use in mainstream Spanish sexological textbooks since the 1950s.²¹ Belbey presented photographs of Marina, a twenty-year-old woman imprisoned for “dressing as the opposite sex.” In [figure 2.2](#), Marina’s pose, her downward look, and her gestures, with her hip slightly inclined to the side, expressed her shyness in an uncomfortable situation. The doctor and his team published multiple articles with information about her life and other examples of people considered transvestites:

photographs, stories, and testimonies of people who transgressed gender rules.²²

In Argentina, Belbey's articles were foundational to the category of *travestismo/transvestidos*, a concept that Belbey directly took from the influential German psychiatrist Richard Von Krafft-Ebing.²³ As I explain above, the use of the concept was rather closer to the medical use of the notion of transvestite to highlight the alleged artificial gender transformation of some subjects than the later identity consolidated in the 1960s. However, in this translation exercise, the doctor was rethinking a concept also present in the previous Argentine theatrical culture to rename a group pushing the rules of gender. Just a few years after Marina's case, mainstream handbooks used by psychiatric institutions deployed the notion of *travestismo* as a regular and defined type of sexual deviation.²⁴ Even though early twentieth-century shows of gender impersonation had popularized an artistic vocabulary that included *travesti* as a reference to the French theatrical tradition, *travestismo* defined the medical labeling to name a transgressive gender experience that was different from the figure of the *invertido* described in the first chapter. Medical and popular languages reflect the complex labels that have organized trans and queer experiences. Beyond the naming process and the future formation of identity, the word named a new corporeal experience mediated by the growing culture of mass consumption, new medical expertise, and the redefinition of public punishment of gender-dissident expression. Engaging in the scientific photographic genre, Belbey compiled examples of how sex could be "falsified." He edited cases previously defined as sexual inverts in the same journal issues and reinterpreted them under the new lenses of *travestissement*.



Figure 2.2. This portrait of Marina was published by José Belbey in several medical publications. The description says, “Disguised as a woman. For six years he dressed and lived as a woman.” José Belbey, “Sobre travestissement,” Medical College Library, Buenos Aires University.

In parallel to medical debates, the concept spread during a context of the configuration of *carrilche*, the language that maricas and other people with nonconforming gender expressions created between pubs and late-night parties. Carrilche redefined the meaning of stigmatizing medical and journalistic concepts.²⁵ Rather than seeing a compact world of people seeking what Belbey called “changing sex,” we should approach this as an underworld with blurred boundaries in which people crossed gender frontiers, as explained in

chapter 1—from effeminate maricas seeking sex with chongos downtown to private parties for sporadic cross-dressing that could work as the basis for those looking for a more permanent gender transgression. This world was open to nonconforming gender experimentation, such as the use of dresses and costumes sometimes restricted to certain nights and in others beyond them.²⁶

Beyond the construction of medical taxonomy, traces of stories of people such as Marina inform us about the repertoires of female embodiment. Her story helps us understand how subjects articulated their female desire through objects and gestures, and how they negotiated their corporeality with others, such as doctors or police officers. Marina had been born in Buenos Aires in 1924. She was an orphan, abandoned by her parents at an early age. Like other children from poor working-class families, Marina worked in domestic service in the house of a wealthy family. Since 1919 the state had fostered charity and public organizations to look for jobs for needy children, part of a practice of social reform aimed at producing what they considered productive citizens.²⁷ Marina ran away from many workhouses, something common among worker-children, who often tried to escape from extreme hierarchical relationships with adults, which sometimes included physical abuse.²⁸ At the age of fourteen, Marina claimed legal independence from her legal tutor and looked for a domestic service job. She explained to Belbey that it was better to be considered a woman in order to get a good position as a housemaid—what could have worked as an excuse to legitimate her gender embodiment. However, she said to Belbey that travestismo progressively took control over her whole life.²⁹

Marina's declaration shows how social class acted as a platform for certain interpretations of gender embodiment. Marina said to the doctor that for women, the domestic labor market was more accessible than for men and that she received better treatment from her employers. She described her sexual transformation as a response to her material needs. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the cleaning and services market had become progressively

more feminized for multiple reasons, such as the broader range of activities available for adult men.³⁰ Notwithstanding the centrality that Marina gave to her job, her narrative could represent an attempt to negotiate what she considered the physician would accept. Marina explained that living with other female workers allowed her to learn about female expressions, clothing, and makeup. She described the attention she paid to the good tips her female colleagues gave her. The doctor states that this is how she discovered all the details that composed her femininity until “she did not need to lie anymore,” something that demonstrates the role of sociability in producing embodied knowledges and technologies.³¹

In 1941 Marina abandoned her work in domestic service and moved to a house with her friends who were sex workers. She started working in the street and in cabarets, offering sexual services to men. Five years earlier Argentina abolished the system of regulated brothels created in 1875. Even if someone was legally allowed to sell sex independently, police officers practiced a punitive interpretation of the law, with which they imprisoned prostitutes for short but repeated periods.³² This explains Marina’s multiple encounters with police officers; she was imprisoned in a women’s jail seven times. Like other prostitutes, she was sent to the San Miguel Asylum, a prison for girls administered by a female religious order. Maybe because of the efficiency of her female performance, Belbey wrote that no one ever doubted her sexuality.³³

Marina also worked in a *dancing*, a working-class pub where men gathered to drink and purchase sexual services. During the 1940s and 1950s, some transformistas offered sexual services in brothels or at private parties. Marina worked as a *copera*, a woman who offered company and alcoholic drinks to their clients in exchange for commission. She used to practice oral sex on her clients in exchange for money. When she was asked to have penetrative sexual encounters, she refused, saying that she was having her period, in order to protect her identity. Belbey did not believe her and sought other opinions. In interviews with Belbey’s team as part of their

medical study of Marina, some clients declared that she had both been penetrated and penetrated some special clients.³⁴

As I explain in [chapter 1](#), gender embodiment and erotic desire did not always align as doctors expected. Marina told the doctors that she was attracted to women. A client told them that she was a *vigogirl*, a then-popular term to name a butch masculine lesbian with a “long and developed clitoris,” and that she was married to another prostitute. The description matches the fact that Marina slept in the same bed with her “friend.”

When the police imprisoned her for a short period, they exposed her “truth” and sent her to the Institute of Legal Medicine. Marina was accused of scandal and lying about her true identity. She did not have any documents as a man or a woman, a possible tactic she used to avoid becoming visible. A medical committee claimed that by losing her records, she avoided doing the mandatory military service, a significant male form of access to Argentine citizenship.³⁵ Nevertheless, the committee suggested that Marina should not be sent to the barracks: “This person shouldn’t be subjected to the corresponding lottery for moral reasons because returned to his true sex, for having finished the comedy, he would have the value of habituation. The work, the good example and the vigilance of his companions would have a better effect.”³⁶ Since the abolition of regulated prostitution in 1936, the military hierarchy increased its concern about the potential extension of sexual deviations among soldiers. During the 1940s many of them supported the return of a legal system of prostitution to prevent “homosexual practices,” which finally found a response in 1944, when the military regime of Edelmiro Farrell installed brothels to offer state-regulated sexual services to the army.³⁷

As I argued in the book’s introduction, Marina produced an alternative practice of belonging that contrasted with her formal exclusion from citizenship. This included, for example, living as and being recognized by other women, by convincing institutions such as prison of her passing as female. However, these tactics could be destroyed by the actions of state agents or doctors. Medicine

included a particular visual genre with these cases, contrasting the “real” and “fake” identities of their subjects. I understand these as countergender technologies: marking gender-nonconforming bodies as artificial in order to classify them in their alleged “natural sex.” These medical photographic practices were in dialogue with a broader repertoire of state agents, such as the prison files that repeated the strategy of undermining trans people’s corporeality.³⁸ Belbey published four photographs to define Marina: two that showed her daily presentation and two without makeup and with a short haircut. If photography production is a space of encounter between expectations and desires, these images are eloquent expressions of the struggles between two points of view in Marina’s gender embodiment.³⁹ Marina’s expression, between sad and expressionless, seems to perturb the celebratory narrative of the doctors about their discoveries and how they expected to force Marina to embrace her masculinity.⁴⁰

The reproduction of these photographs must be carefully considered. While photography always contains certain degrees of negotiation, Belbey’s photographs were forcibly produced to erase Marina’s gender embodiment. Elena Martinez argues that queer history must carry the responsibility for thinking about how to avoid reenacting forms of historical violence, calling our attention to the challenge of working with documents that were usually produced through medical and police violence.⁴¹ As I explain in the introduction, I engage with Fernández Galeano’s proposal of a transhermeneutic that can help us avoid turning away from these types of documents and think about how can we trace trans agency.⁴² I propose to think about how historical narrative can neutralize the primary intentions of photographers, by rescuing Marina’s desire for female self-presentation.

Even if there is no formula, I think that analyzing these images is useful on at least two levels. First, as Coleman shows, sometimes these photographs allow us to think about all the images the archives do not want us to see.⁴³ Along with the pictures in which Belbey tried to destroy Marina’s female embodiment, he published a portrait

(figure 2.2) that allows us to imagine the multiple pictures that have not been preserved, the moments of joy in which Marina could build the image of how she expected to be seen by others. Other police records of the same period show similar gender expressions. Under the label “Mujeres (?),” the archive of the federal prison preserves a collection of the everyday lives of female gender-variant prisoners from what seem to be the late 1940s and early 1950s. The possibly sarcastic label “Mujeres (?)”—it is not clear whether the label was catalogued during the times of production of the photographs or by archivists that worked before the federal intervention in 2020—expresses the impossibility of classifying experiences that overflowed the language of gender. In those photographs taken in prison cells, these female and unnamed characters show their everyday lives during detention, use revealing garments, and perform ultrafeminine poses.⁴⁴

Marina’s photographs also allow us to reconstruct the power relationship that shaped that image. While it is valid to formulate a question about whether we should use this image, I propose here to reinvert the question of how we use it in order to avoid reenacting the medical violence against Marina’s body. In this sense the question is not only whether we should show this image or not but whether we can formulate a historical narrative that reinverts the intentions of this picture. In contrast with Belbey’s aim of seeing this picture as proof of Marina’s portrayal as a male citizen, the role of queer and trans histories is to distrust the doctor’s categories and to formulate a narrative focusing on the ways in which Marina was embodying femininity, and how she used this photo to reaffirm her femininity beyond medical power.

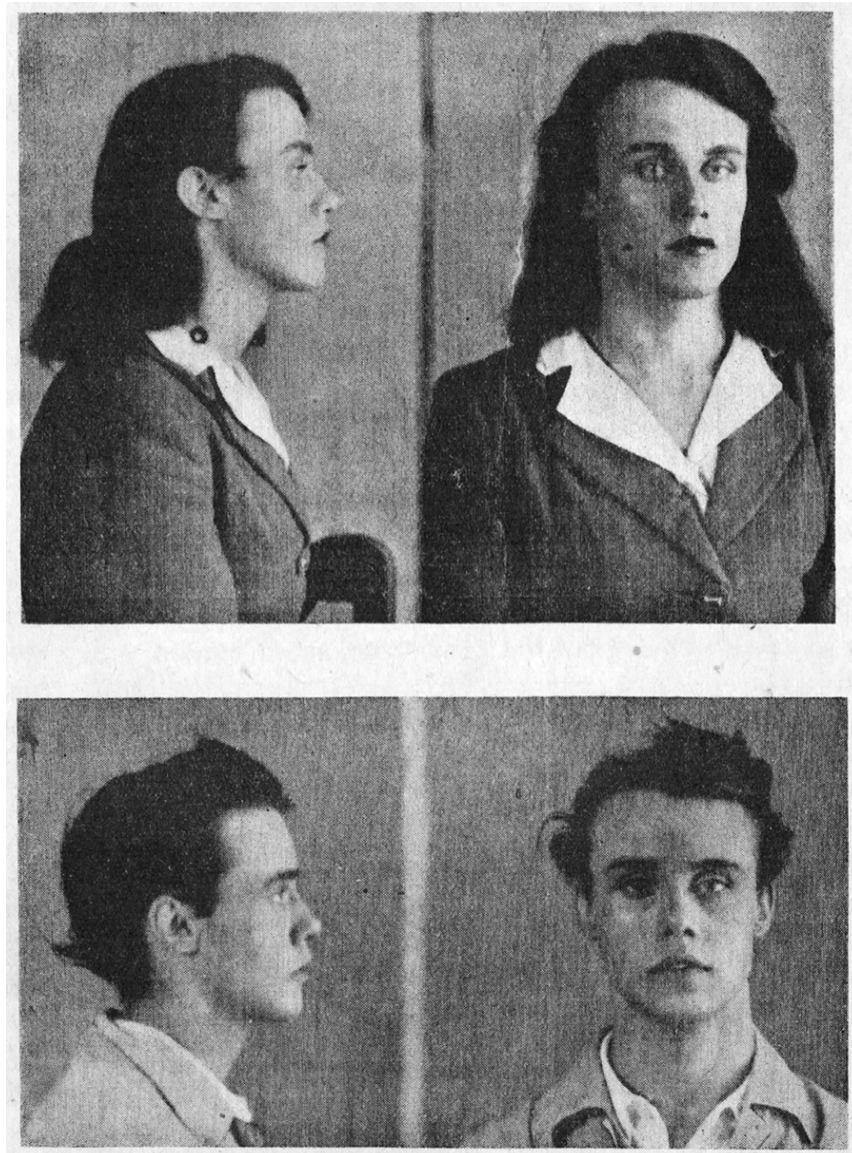


Figure 2.3. Photographs of Marina produced by José Belbey’s team. José Belbey, “Sobre travestiment,” *Archivo de medicina legal* 4 (1944), 124. Medical College Library, University of Buenos Aires.

Bodies were a terrain of struggle in which science, law, and trans people struggled to define the limits of gender belonging. Marina’s embodiment articulated a particular posture and gestures ([fig 2.2](#))—hands together, a downward look, and hips turned to one side. When we consider these together, the photographer’s intention to contrast the shy lady presented in [figure 2.2](#) and the alleged man at the bottom is more evident ([figure 2.3](#)). In the top right picture in [figure](#)

2.3, Marina is looking slightly outside the frame. The second frontal image looks like a mugshot for a legal document, a place where the state neglected Marina's self-presentation in order to affirm the reading of her male body. The picture was a product of several acts of violence, such as being detained by police officers, the doctors' interrogation, and the newspaper spreading her secret. It was also a material possession of the goods that gave sense to her self-perception: her makeup and long hair. Marina's body was submitted to a process of gender reinscription, the violent dispossession of the materiality of her femininity. Maybe she was trying to contain her feelings and present the image she thought the doctors expected of her so that she could get back to her everyday life. She may have tried to follow the rules of the process, but the slight expression of sadness in her eyes and mouth shows the highly uncomfortable situation.⁴⁵ Her emotional expression in an expected neutral photographic space could be read as an act that perturbs the medical narrative. While men have been represented as rational citizens lacking emotions, Marina's sadness looks like an emotional performance usually expected of women. This lack of ability to accept the process of dematerialization of her gender presented by doctors as a liberation seemed to reaffirm how Marina disagreed with their celebratory narrative.

The haircut with which they adjusted Marina's face to make it look male is part of the state repertoires for archiving social hierarchies in gender-nonconforming bodies. Hair, in particular, was conceived of as a distinctive element of gender, class, and race distinction. Furthermore, hair was a very personal possession that state forces usually cut to humiliate or mark sovereignty over the imprisoned body. For example, in 1923, the ultra-right-wing nationalist group the Patriotic League conducted street arrests of men considered disorderly, shaving them and removing their mustaches.⁴⁶ This was a popular tradition among soldiers and police officers, who had previously targeted beggars, gauchos, and Indigenous people.⁴⁷ Decades later, during the 1960s and 1970s, the police morality department would apply shaving to condemn young hippies,

homosexuals, and travestis. Likewise, police officers banned travestis from shaving their body hair and forced them to grow beards as a practice of humiliation.⁴⁸

The case of Marina underscores that clothing was a vital practice of gender embodiment. A journalist wrote of her, “When she was arrested in the street, she wore a maroon pouch and skirt, a light blue blouse with a neckline that hung above the lapels, a light brown leather wallet hanging from the shoulder, currently in vogue, high heels, and fine mesh stockings.”⁴⁹ Marina’s clothes seemed to be made by a tailor; compared with other fashions of the time, her skirt was slightly shorter. In contrast with pictures taken of invertis in the 1920s, when they made a strong performance of elite femininity with tight corsets, huge dresses, and hats, Marina’s daily image in the 1940s appeared to be more related to the emerging daily attire of pink-collar workers.⁵⁰

Another example from the 1940s shows that while doctors produced knowledge about their bodies, maricas and *travestis* developed techniques for how to adapt female clothing to their bodies. Some of them worked sewing costumes on the artistic circuit. This was the case of Malva—nowadays considered a trans and marica heroine—a Chilean marica/trans who walked over the Andes to get to Argentina in order to avoid social and legal control.⁵¹ Once she arrived Malva discovered that Argentina was not the paradise for sexual dissidents that she had imagined, because of state repression. In 1942 a scandal of erotic and suggestive photographs by soldiers in military quarters had increased police raids against men looking for sexual encounters in the street. Likewise, even if the Peronist government created a paradoxical relaxation of some moralistic public values, the government progressively increased police action against homosexuals in order to prove its endorsement of Catholic morality. In particular, during the mid-1950s, the government was facing the open resistance of the Catholic Church, one of the main factors that led to the military coup of 1955 and that pushed a Peronist morality drive that included several police raids.⁵² But repressive contexts have never stopped maricas. *Maridaje* was a

queer popular party that simulated a marriage between a *marica* and a *garrote*—a man who self-identified as heterosexual—also called *dorrilche*. All the guests contributed money so that the party could be set up outside the city to avoid the police.⁵³ Given her experience working on the performance circuit, Malva helped her friends prepare their dresses for private parties or to participate in the carnival. During some of these wedding parties, Malva helped her friend Jorgelina adapt her dress. It was impossible to get a wedding dress that could be adjusted to the size of her thorax. Malva therefore used another cloth to make it bigger, and Jorgelina was able to perform at her party while the public celebrated, shouting, “Long live the bride!”⁵⁴



Figure 2.4. Malva and her friends during a private party. *From left to right:* Jorgelina, Chacha, Sonia la indomable, Malva, and sanjuanino. Jorgelina’s wedding. Trans Memory Archive. Malva Solis Collection. 1945.

Malva's collections are eloquent expressions of the role of photography in producing a personal archive, in contrast with those photographs produced by doctors and the police. Showing off their dresses, exaggerating bodily gestures, and posing were fundamental keys to female embodiment. Likewise, these photographs highlight the impact of a restricted public intimacy. The private parties and meetings among friends were limited spaces of freedom in a conservative context. In them the guests could deploy experimentation with clothing, moments in which they shared knowledge on how to achieve female embodiment. Moreover, Malva also had photographs produced in professional studios. These photographs circulated among friends and lovers, always with the risk of them falling into the wrong hands.⁵⁵

Returning to the case of Marina, we can see that her multiple embodiment techniques show the power of objects. The growth of mass consumption during the 1940s transformed female beauty standards and popularized embodied knowledges. The consumption and production of knowledge reproduced structured canons of female beauty. Even if some historians have seen beauty as a mechanism of normalization, new conceptualizations help us understand it as an expansive notion of political action. As Toussounian shows, women such as Marina redefined images of femininity in the cultural language of popular consumption.⁵⁶ These uses were at the same time transgressions and a reification of normative models through daily practices.

Marina and other so-called travestis also used home methods popularized in magazines to feminize their bodies. To treat her skin, Marina "plucked her body hair off her thorax, arms, and legs artificially." Marina's embodiment practices show the artificiality of what nowadays would be called the cis/trans boundary; she deployed the same techniques as people normatively defined as women. Since the beginning of the century, urban magazines had published multiple waxing techniques; for decades different beauty houses had promoted treatments imported from the United States and France, as well as electric procedures.⁵⁷ Hair salons and dermatologists had

also offered private waxing services.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, it is difficult to imagine that travestis commonly accessed public treatments that could risk their being denounced for falsifying their identities. Cheap books taught women how to wax themselves at home,⁵⁹ and the readers' mail section answered beauty questions for women about possible home waxing techniques.⁶⁰ Doctors offered solutions for bearded women, explaining how they could create a soft face.⁶¹ A popular magazine edited by leftist trade unionists gave multiple recommendations for female beauty. Between 1937 and 1941, the journal explained, for example, how women could reduce unwanted body hair.⁶² However, the information provided pointed out the unexpected effects of these treatments, including the more robust growth of unwanted body hair after treatment, and suggested using chamomile to make unwanted hairs blonde to camouflage their presence, along with different methods of makeup application that could enhance their eyebrows.⁶³

Gender embodiment also included transforming gender characteristics. The doctor noted that Marina used cotton to define her breasts. Besides, he wrote, she "is always using a hygienic cloth tied to his hips that elevates his genitals; it works as a suspensory," a technique that years later travestis defined as *trucadora* (the thing that tricks).⁶⁴ Marina also used a "dedicated voice, when we met him, we thought we were in front of a lady dressed as a man," as one doctor described.⁶⁵

Wrong Bodies and Scalpels

The post–World War II world boosted a revolution in gender embodiment. The famous story of Christine Jorgensen (1929–89), an American ex-soldier who pursued gender-affirmation surgery in Denmark, popularized biotechnological treatments around the world. In his pioneering study on trans masculinities in the Argentine media, Lucas Disalvo studies how Argentine newspapers rapidly published other similar stories transforming the debates about gender transitions. He points out that this media coverage

stigmatized gender transgressions as abnormalities contrary to national identity.⁶⁶ Going through similar magazine and newspaper articles from *Archivos Desviados* and the *National Library*, I notice, as Disalvo did, that the increasing attention to medicalized gender affirmation experiences could also open spaces for identification. In 1953 the international story of Arash—a young Iranian man—got onto the cover of *Ahora*, an Argentine tabloid magazine. At sixteen years old, he pursued surgery and got legal recognition as a man.⁶⁷ In 1954 the Argentine publisher Freeland translated Roberta Cowell's autobiography, *Yo fui hombre (mi transformación de hombre a mujer)* (I Was a Man [My Transformation from Man to Woman]), originally published in English as *Roberta Cowell's Story—By Herself*), in which the UK pilot narrated her transition.⁶⁸ In Buenos Aires the book was sold in Harrods Bookshop, just next to the bar Augustus, a popular venue among maricas in the mid-twentieth century.⁶⁹ Over the next decade, similar stories flooded the press, for example, that of Jackeline Gallaci, a Brazilian that “became a woman helped with hormones and a scalpel.” During interviews, Jackeline insisted that she “was born in the wrong body.” She worked in the theater to earn the massive amount of money needed to pay for her treatment. She stated, “I prefer to die rather than to continue living as a man.” By borrowing scientific language of hermaphroditism, she insisted that she had features of both sexes, and with the help of hormones and surgery, she was able to become a “full woman.”⁷⁰

The medical discourse of the wrong body didn't replace other understandings of gender transgression. The documentary sources suggest that multiple gender-nonconforming experiences coexisted and overlapped over time. The new media attention on surgeries, hormones, and medical intervention made available a new narrative for self-identification shaped by the “wrong body” narrative.⁷¹ As Liliana's story above shows, the popular portrayal of gender transition could work at a double level: while it created public awareness of the lives of people who transitioned and boosted the policing of them, it also spread a common language, a platform for those seeking to identify with others who had a nonconforming

gender experience. During the 1950s Buenos Aires was a modern and cosmopolitan city with a prominent cultural market based on high literacy rates and expanding popular consumption.⁷² In this period the transsexual French superstar Coccinelle transformed the Argentine representation of sexual transformation.⁷³ Coccinelle became one of the most famous women to undergo a vaginoplasty, in 1958, changed her legal documents to “woman” in 1962, and, in that same year, married a French publicist. After two failed attempts to travel to Argentina, in 1958 and 1961, when the government denied her a visa based on “moral” proscriptions, Coccinelle became a local celebrity on the covers of popular and scientific magazines.⁷⁴



Figure 2.5. Coccinelle on the cover of the popular magazine *Así*, July 12, 1962, N 337. Archivos Desviados.

The media defined Coccinelle as “an anatomical-physiological phenomenon of the twentieth century, a masterpiece of bioengineering.”⁷⁵ Surprisingly, the media usually portrayed her in a positive light. She expressed the promise of postwar science: the new hope in the limitless progress of medicine and its ability to transform everything. One journalist normalized her feminine figure by describing Coccinelle’s good qualities as a housewife.⁷⁶ Coccinelle’s subsequent divorce and a not-very-credible affair with a dancer at the theater Maipo (Buenos Aires), who soon afterward launched herself as the “Latin American Coccinelle” through a “profound

hormonal treatment,” kept the French star in the eye of the Argentine tabloids for several years.⁷⁷ Journalists highlighted the fact that she had married through the Church and had legal papers as a woman, which seemed incredible to the Argentine audience. Coccinelle reshaped the representation of the transsexual body and promoted the idea that one could choose one’s sex and be an object of desire. As an erotic magazine pointed out, “No man would care about his wife’s past if she has Coccinelle’s sensual power.”⁷⁸

Coccinelle performed in mainstream venues such as the National Theater and the Maipo—the most popular theater for variety shows—and different clubs. Paparazzi photographed her walking around Buenos Aires with her husband, and dining in luxurious restaurants, where she displayed the elegant clothes that she brought with her in her seventeen suitcases. Coccinelle thus began a Latin American tour that would take her to Chile, Peru, and Uruguay. She participated in the films *Los viciosos* (1962; dir. Enrique Carreras) and *Días de viejo color* (1968; dir. Pedro Olea). As we see in the next chapter, several travestis and transsexuals felt Coccinelle’s presence as a turning point. When she arrived at the airport in Buenos Aires, a journalist noticed “a particular audience dressed as the third sex,” the concept with which they defined those who embodied feminine features.⁷⁹

Coccinelle transformed local medical culture. Her life had several references in *El cambio de sexo*, a handbook edited by Argentine and Chilean doctors in Buenos Aires. The medical authors used her pictures to illustrate medical treatments. Her example was an opportunity to rethink the limits of sex—to discuss what it was and how someone defined it. These doctors used the concept of transsexuality, created in Europe in 1949, to distinguish between travestis—people who used clothes of the “opposite sex”—and “homosexuals who define themselves as women, and look for medical treatments to change sex.”⁸⁰

Global stories augmented locals’ interpretation of the narrative of “being born in the wrong body,” which was a powerful language for making sense of how science could correct nature’s mistakes, and possibly a rhetorical resource spread by the media with which trans

people negotiated their place in society. As Carvajal points out, this imagery reaffirmed the normalizing power of medicine to erase the abnormalities associated with homosexuality or perversion to build a controlled female body.⁸¹ The case of Liliana introduced at the beginning of the chapter is illustrative. Asked by the press, Liliana affirmed, “I had long ago realized that I was not born to be a man, and the clash between my spirituality and the fiction I was living was shocking. [. . .] I constantly considered myself a sick woman, thought and felt like a woman, and was obliged to live and act like the other sex.” After reading an article about María Fernanda (a case of female transition introduced later in this chapter), she booked an appointment with Dr. Defazio—one of the first specialists in these treatments in the country—who performed two surgeries on her body.⁸²

In 1965 Liliana told the press that she was still waiting for new documents based on her doctor’s statement that she was a *hermafrodita*.⁸³ Along with the “wrong body” language, trans people usually justify their gender-transition requests by presenting themselves as hermaphrodites. Even if it was difficult to prove when this was true, this reference was related to a broader popular and medical belief that medical interventions were legitimate when they corrected rather than transformed sex. However, in 1969 the physicians working in the court decided that she did not have any intersexual condition and that her genitals had been ruined by hormone consumption.⁸⁴ However, class solidarity activated other mechanisms of gender recognition. In 1961 some members of the postal workers’ union, who at the end of the 1960s founded the first Argentine radical homosexual organization, Nuestro Mundo, pushed the public company to accept Liliana as a woman, and the union health care fund reimbursed her surgery fees.⁸⁵

Liliana’s interpretation of the “wrong body” discourse became a mainstream language for many people transitioning from one gender to another. Liliana was usually given the title the “Argentine Coccinelle,” and journalists used photographs to show how science normalized her body, and they recounted all the details of every

medical intervention to their audience.⁸⁶ In 1963 Liliana announced her engagement to the singer Ramón de Linares. She took several pictures showing her bathing suit, dresses, and hairstyle. Some days later she would launch her South American dance tour with her boyfriend. This normalizing corrective power was associated with Liliana's body size, a 33-20-33, very close to the mainstream formula of the perfect female body of 36-24-36. The press associated her affirmation as a woman with two central female rituals: getting married and becoming a mother. Liliana confirmed her marriage in Tres Arroyos, a small city in Buenos Aires province associated with agricultural production, in a "very traditional family restaurant."⁸⁷

The fact that she was getting married to her boyfriend affirmed her claim for new documents under the idea that medicine corrected her real nature as a hermaphrodite. Asked by the press if she was going to provide a son for her husband, Dr. Defazio replied, "Nature had committed a mistake that medical science has corrected. If nature now wants her to, she can be a mother." However, Liliana challenged this question by pointing out that "many women in the world cannot have children. . . . It must be a tragedy. If I can't conceive, I will adopt."⁸⁸ Liliana's female identity was not accepted in the court as it was in the press, but with agency over medical discourses, she pushed the limits of belonging to femininity.

In summary, from the 1940s to the 1960s, there was a rapid transformation of the notion of "sex change." From an understanding mostly restricted to clothing to the emergence of biomedical procedures and the category of transsexuality, this section explores the rapid transformation in the context in which some people transitioned from male to female gender.

Being a *Macho Argentino*: Prosthetics for the Inverted Souls

The "wrong body" narrative also mediated the experience of male gender embodiment. In contrast with the female experiences of the twentieth century, as I show in [chapter 4](#), the path of medicalization would become more popular among trans men in 1970s Argentina.

Between the 1940s and 1970s, male embodiment affirmation practices were based on clothing, prosthetics, and forged documents. The following stories illuminate how during this period class identities mediated the male trans imagination, repertoire, and public portrayal.

Doctors José Belbey and Alfredo Zanchi published the story of Pedro, who was born in 1929 in Buenos Aires. In 1944 his parents took him to the doctor to cure his “anomalous condition.” Even though they had raised him as a girl, he rejected all their intentions, such as wearing dresses and playing girls’ games, and fought to be recognized as a boy.⁸⁹ From a young age, he claimed to have heterosexual male erotic fantasies. He dreamed of sexual encounters with female schoolmates, where he performed the act using phallic objects such as pistols or sticks. Doctors did not classify Pedro as a *tribadista* (lesbian).⁹⁰ Instead, they highlighted that the heterosexual fantasy was at the core of his male experience.⁹¹

Pedro’s repertoire of technology shows the affective power of objects for performing gender. By this I mean that in forging gendered corporeality for themselves and others, trans male subjects exhibited more attachment to particular objects because of their cultural value. Gender technologies are not static objects; a dress or a pair of trousers changes through interaction when someone activates it by walking in a certain way, aligning their gender value with what others expect of its use.⁹² Belbey and Zanchi noted of Pedro that “she loves summer [. . .] the time when she can use trousers and does not feel ridiculous, as she does with her female dresses.” All narratives seemed to measure the happiness and pleasure that emerged from attitudes, objects, and the social right to this kind of expression. The doctor wrote that he “actually uses men’s jackets and smokes,” an attitude that could be close to the contemporary masculine tango archetype. The doctor added that Pedro “used to cut his hair and comb it with a proper style, to have a virile appearance that harmonizes with his spirit and libido.”⁹³ Just as this successful performance guaranteed Pedro’s joy, anguish was also part of his life. He told the doctor that he was concerned about his anatomy, and he

was looking for possible ways of changing it. This requirement may have been motivated by the increasing circulation of newspaper articles about possible body modifications, such as those analyzed in the previous sections.

Class identities were central to the making of male transitions in the mid-century because class and gender identities were inseparable, and economic resources could allow some trans men to build less fragile forms of recognition. Pedro tried to escape home several times, get a job, and guarantee a life for himself. Nonetheless, social class and sexual recognition acted as limits to Pedro's plan. Getting a life of one's own was expensive. He told the doctors that employers had fired him from several jobs, and he'd had to return to his parents' house. He lacked access to technologies of embodiment in order to be read as a male worker; he did not have papers, and he was not able to "buy" social recognition. Saying that working-class identities worked as a vehicle of male embodiment means that corporeal productivity was a central characteristic for male belonging. Pedro hated house chores, as he interpreted them as "woman's work." The doctor noted that he reacted to such work with a "deeply disgusted expression." In contrast, the doctors noted that he smiled when he talked about physical work, for example, farming, like his father.⁹⁴

In other cases, working-class and plebeian identities worked as vehicles of male embodiment. According to the newspapers, in 1958 Norman Victor—whom doctors catalogued as a hermaphrodite—got judicial approval to change his documents to male and perform gender-affirmation surgery. Victor was popular with his neighbors, a working man who helped his family with his job in a mechanic's workshop. Norman was a talented fighter who had given a good beating to other boys of his age. He participated in the soccer games of lower-class young men. The published photos in the newspapers show Victor with a big smile, achieving his new gender and the celebration of his friends, who considered him a part of the group.⁹⁵

Plebeian male identities were productive for some male transitions because they were associated with specific rights to use public space

or with physical capabilities, such as intermale violence. In 1962 *Así* covered the story of R., titled “This Man Is a Woman.” R. was born in 1944. He lived in Boedo, a popular neighborhood of the city of Buenos Aires, with his parents and his younger brother. Like other working-class boys, he spent a lot of time playing with other youngsters in the bar or the street. R. helped with the house chores and took care of his little brother, with whom he usually played soccer, and he also had a part-time job as a local hairdresser. The photographs published by the press portrayed him with trousers, shirts, and short hair. He liked to play football and talk about politics, two characteristics culturally associated in Argentina with male life. R. affirmed his masculinity from a young age; he decided to abandon school because he was not allowed to wear male clothes. During his early years, his mother tried to stop his transformation by, for example, destroying all her son’s favorite trousers in a fit of rage to force him to wear skirts. Asked by a journalist, he replied that he dreamed of having the same freedoms every man had.⁹⁶

Other examples demonstrate how class and masculinity worked together in a repertoire of attitudes and objects. Jorge was imprisoned in the western metropolitan area of Buenos Aires in 1967. He was thirty-three years old and the leader of a gang of thieves that attacked houses in the area. Even though he had been imprisoned several times, in 1967 the police were surprised when they discovered Jorge’s genitalia after a medical exam: doctors accused him of falsifying his identity. Jorge embodied the manly leader of a violent criminal gang with trousers, shirt, and combed hair, and publicly displayed his affairs.



Figure 2.6. Jorge on the cover of the magazine *Así*. October 10, 1967.
Archivos Desviados.

The wrong-body narrative was also productive for men. While talking with journalists, Jorge described his life: “I have always liked being a man, but nature played me a horrible joke. I decided to live my life simulating being a man as revenge.” While Pedro and R. felt a powerful attachment to their trousers, Jorge was obsessed with combing. The photograph of him on a magazine cover shows him combing his hair, constructing every detail of his manly body. While he was in prison, he requested a comb from the police officers, and after being denied it, he got so violent that they were forced to give him one. Jorge combed his hair energetically, a pose that he repeated

in front of the press cameras, perhaps as a gesture to reaffirm his manly embodiment in a situation in which he felt insecure.⁹⁷

Because of the precariousness of gender-affirmation technologies, corporeal attitude and interpersonal relationships were central. Body affirmation was also a collective process: an interrelational art necessary to building consensus. Jorge's male repertoire was efficient. No one in his gang admitted any suspicions about his male embodiment. They described him as a very violent man, something expected among the popular classes. Before his criminal adventures, Jorge had worked as a bricklayer in state-funded construction work. By falsifying his documents, he gained precarious legal recognition as a man. He also cohabited simultaneously with two women who claimed not to know that he was not a man, and one even told the press that Jorge was the father of her son. Jorge was portrayed as an extremely violent person with his partners and usually "disciplined" them with physical punishments.⁹⁸ Even if some people condemned this, society tolerated husbands' use of violence to control their wives. From the 1930s onward, advertising offered products to control male nervousness and to prevent male violence.⁹⁹ Trial records showed that violence was a component of popular male domestic social control over women's domestic economies. The paradox of the male citizenship model was that while the state chose men as the central element of the nation, men were also imagined as having an irrational and uncontrollable sexual impulse, an ungovernable sexual nature that needed to be policed by the state to protect the development of the nation.

In contrast with working-class male embodiment, other people embodied figures associated with male economic success. Horacio Reyes Hernández was born in Montevideo (Uruguay) in 1927.¹⁰⁰ He grew up in a wealthy family of landowners. While his twin sister was considered normal, doctors defined his genitalia as an anomaly usually named *hermafrodita*. During his first ten years, Horacio grew up as a boy, and his parents took him to multiple doctors in Argentina and Uruguay to discuss the best option for his future. Overwhelmed by the future problems his parents imagined this

situation could generate for their son, they took him to the Ramos Mejía Hospital in Buenos Aires. The doctors decided to perform “corrective surgery,” with which they mutilated his “5 cm penis” based on the idea that his “dominant sex was female” and that by being a woman, he would be able to reproduce during adulthood.¹⁰¹

As this case demonstrates, in the 1930s Argentine doctors believed that intersexuality was the product of an intermediate state in the fetus’s sexual development. Consequently, they understood that *hermafroditas* needed medical help to complete this process. During the twentieth century, the influence of eugenicist perspectives, such as Pende’s Italian biotypology in the 1920s and the Spanish doctor Marañón’s theory, introduced new ideas of intersexuality and surgeries promoting the use of hormones to normalize bodies considered abnormal.¹⁰² Cheap sexology courses published in popular magazines made these theories available to a broader audience. Guided by Marañón’s theory, these journals criticized the idea of an “absolute sex” and recognized the coexistence of multiple sexual features in every individual. Under this point of view, the “true sex” could be “sleeping” in everybody, waiting to awaken.¹⁰³

Despite his parents’ efforts to transform Horacio into a girl, he continued to consider himself a boy. He rejected playing with dolls and wearing dresses; he preferred to perform activities restricted to boys, such as climbing trees and riding horses. When he reached legal age (twenty-one years old), while his sister moved to Europe to be educated and look for a husband, like other upper-class girls of her age, Horacio decided to move to Argentina.¹⁰⁴

Migration was a powerful embodiment practice: crossing borders was the perfect opportunity to achieve independence from parents’ tutelage and restrictions and to plan a new life. Moving to another country allowed people to break communal and familial controls. For example, in 1953 Chilean police imprisoned two Argentines accused of self-identity falsification. According to the newspapers, Lucas, who was what today we would call a cisgender man, and María, who transitioned from male to female, had moved from Mendoza to Santiago de Chile with the hope of starting a new life together. They

opened a greengrocer's shop. A pawnbroker reported that the couple was trying to get loans with dubious documents and put an end to their new life plan.¹⁰⁵

Legal documents were important for those looking to guarantee social recognition of their gender embodiment. Doctors focused on creating boundaries to avoid what they considered illegitimate changes to protect the political value of masculinity. Male legal citizenship determined rights that were denied to women, including the vote before 1947 and civil rights until 1968. The medical concern about gender boundaries was related to the vital role of legal sex in defining citizenship. The Argentine elite had imagined male citizens as active agents in the reproduction and population of healthy workers, soldiers, and consumers for a country imagined as empty. They understood these people to be the vital element of the straight, healthy reproduction of their families. In 1937 a case of the recognition of a fifteen-year-old male citizen after a "corrective surgery" involved influential scholars and politicians. The well-known lawyer, doctor, and member of Parliament Nerio Rojas declared: "Sex is a fundamental function in essential things such as love and the survival of the species. This little decision has crucial political and legal effects, so we must not take it without a wider consensus."¹⁰⁶ Rojas's statement expressed the struggle surrounding every single change that could dismantle the gender core of citizenship.¹⁰⁷ Rojas was not just concerned about a simple change in one life. The problem was to give authorization to potential "sexual deviates" without reproductive capabilities who could pervert the institution of marriage.¹⁰⁸

Legal documents expanded Horacio's possibilities for constructing his male life, and in 1957 he married Sara. In two years he became an influential merchant and landlord in the southern Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area. He invested in a property development company and rented several stores to local shops. He dressed in modern suits, achieving popularity among his neighbors as an important businessman. Horacio was a successful man until a car accident at Christmas in 1970. He begged the doctors not to examine him, but he

could not stop them, and they discovered his lack of a penis. The hospital accused him of using a false identity and cheating legal officers about his documents. This situation exposed him to the press, which dedicated several weeks to recovering every detail of his past life. The press widely publicized the story, and the first Argentine gay magazine, *Nuestro mundo*, even republished the article.¹⁰⁹ This massive public exposure acted as a countergender technology that dismantled Horacio's social recognition as a man.

The story of Horacio shows the new prosthetic dimensions of male embodiment. Sara told the press that she never noticed his lack of male genitals, that he bought a prosthetic penis from Denmark, a country presented in magazines as one of the leaders in sexual technology.¹¹⁰ Doctors had developed these kinds of products along with phalloplasties during the interwar period as part of the multiple treatments with which they tried to recover the dismembered bodies of soldiers.¹¹¹ Horacio was a pretty successful seducer. He cheated on his wife with at least two other women. He also used a bandage to conceal his chest.

Horacio had a stable relationship with the couple's former housemaid, who lived in Horacio's apartment and was supported economically by him after being fired by Sara. In 1966 he separated from Sara. The Argentine state banned legal divorce until 1987. A neighbor declared to the press: "He used to beat Sara so much, she has leg paralysis. I listened to them argue several times, she was jealous of their housemaid, and she was right, they are lovers." The neighbor added, "When Horacio abandoned his wife to move in with his friend, a very handsome morocha called Berta, who used to be the housemaid but acted as the house owner, I found her crying in the stairs. She told me that she misses him so much. She cried, and her eye drops were charged with a huge amount of love."¹¹²

Horacio's cheating, violence, sexual performance, and erotic adventures were part of the usual narratives about trans men in the press. Horacio's gendered techniques and attitudes were part of his interpretation of the dominant model of masculinity. This attitude fits perfectly with the cultural construction of the *macho argentino*,

who was supposed to be a rough man and a romantic lover. During this period men were allowed and even encouraged to have an active sexual life, including outside marriage, despite the moral double standard.

Horacio embodied a specific Argentinian dominant masculinity: the successful self-made man and the male provider of his family. Horacio considered himself a “good Christian man,” and his priest visited him in the hospital to urge the press to leave him alone. In contrast with Pedro, his economic power boosted his male repertoire, for example, by providing him access to a Danish prosthesis and establishing essential social capital. Horacio’s male performance was inseparable from his identity as an influential merchant, economically active and capable of affording space of his own, a prosthesis, and supporting his lovers if they needed it. He expressed the image of the self-made migrant man who accessed the Argentinean dream of progress, a position with which he could mitigate possible social restrictions to his perceived gender.

Nevertheless, beyond the social and legal practices Horacio used to achieve recognition, social violence limited his male embodiment. The accident opened a field of struggle where state agents, police officers, and members of civil society acted to destroy his image. Some of his clients told the press that they would not work with him anymore. A group of neighbors went to the hospital to force the director to expel him from facilities as a “monster” (for his gender transgression). A woman who defined herself as a mother told the press:

I will tell you the truth. . . . It is a humiliation. A man must act himself as a man and a woman as a woman. Why should we accept the deviation of a total abnormal? The residents in this neighborhood have decided to act. We will ask about this subject—I do not know what to call it, and our hospital must expel the woman who was in the car with him. They can go anywhere they choose where everyone will talk about them. What do you want me to say! It is affecting us. No sir! It is impossible to tolerate this. We must protect our children who visit this institution.¹¹³

According to the press, there was a popular demand that “he must go away,” and people were “ashamed and furious.”¹¹⁴

Yet, even though the press used jokes to describe Horacio's life, the tone was more respectful than the one they used with female travestis. A journalist asked himself if Horacio was "sick or a victim."¹¹⁵ Some articles considered him a victim of the horrible decision of a doctor and his parents, a surgery that ruined his life and frustrated him. A journalist claimed, "After being raised as a boy, it is impossible to pretend that just [by] mutilating an organ, he will adapt his psychology as a woman."¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, the damage was done, and it seemed to be impossible to stop. Civil society deployed a mechanism to destroy Horacio's life. Weeks after the accident, he died in the hospital; a doctor told the press that "Horacio died of sadness." Even if it is impossible to measure the emotional costs of the collapse of his public image, it is even more challenging to imagine how his life would have continued in such a hostile environment. Police added off the record to the media, "Poor guy. He died. He would never become a normal person." The death certificate recognized Horacio as he defined himself to a journalist—as a "correct and straight" man.¹¹⁷

In summary, the generation that experienced their transitions from female to male in the era of transition of the "sex change" adapted the medical narrative of being trapped in the "wrong body" without relying on high medicalization. By using prosthetic technologies and clothing, and mediated by socioeconomic cultures, people who today we would define as trans men reimagined and embodied what it meant to be a *macho argentino*.

The Limits of Scalpels: Science, Law, and Trans Desire

The question of the limit of gender transitions placed conflicts between science, law, and trans desire at the center of the Argentine modernization project. It was an encounter between collective and individual ideas of the future: the enlightenment of a nation and its citizens, scientific development, and personal growth. Because policy makers understood reproductive potency to be central to national development, they sought to regulate this potency as an extension of

nation-state sovereignty over an allegedly empty territory. The interventionist state increased its attention over how policing the limits of population desire could be distinctive to modulate the national future. The new scientific ideas of the postwar world—shaped by the prosthetic experiments developed by healing soldiers' bodies—created new conditions for testing the limits of the human body and encouraged some doctors to go beyond the confining restrictions of the past. In this context some people affirming their gender reshaped the idea of sex, usually motivated by the idea that nature was mistaken: they expressed their desire to live by affirming a new gender identity. The conflict between these forces shows that in the mid-twentieth century, the classic formula that assumed that legal and medical discourses converged to regulate sexuality was simplistic. Judges policed some physicians who were experimenting with bodily transformations beyond the limits of what was considered a dangerous threat for the alleged national future. The story of this encounter transformed state regulation over the body's plasticity and led to the ban on sex change operations in 1967. This prohibition fostered a nonmedical path of body experimentation that I analyze in the following chapters.¹¹⁸

The rapid transition from prosthetic to medically mediated sex change attracted the attention of the media and policy makers. Between them, they created a new scenario of conflict to define the limits of people's control over their bodies, as many of the following stories show.

María Fernanda was born in Andalgala (Catamarca, northern Argentina) in 1925. She described her life in female terms, pointing out that she avoided playing with other boys during her childhood because she did not like football and instead preferred to play with dolls or garden with her grandma. María Fernanda understood her "female nature" as a "dual sexuality": "God's will." After her father died and she completed her mandatory military service, María decided to seek medical assistance to affirm her gender. First she traveled to Tucuman, the capital city of the province of the same name, where she was not able to find any medical help. After she

attempted suicide, her family moved to Buenos Aires city, where María hoped to find medical assistance. In 1957 she met the doctor Francisco Defazio, one of the first Argentine specialists in experimental sex-change treatments, who offered her free hormone treatment and, later, four surgeries so that she could become “a full woman.”¹¹⁹

In 1962 María Fernanda submitted a request in court to be legally recognized as a woman, but two years later the judge Bunge Campos rejected her request. After several medical tests, he concluded, “Taking into account his robust, almost athletic build, ample shoulders, hips, fat distribution, and his large nose. [. . .] there is no doubt about the artificiality of his transformation. He is still a man.” The judge added that “neither the upbringing and social sex, nor the legal and juridical, generate any problem. Our positive legislation rejects this possibility.”¹²⁰ The specialists considered that María Fernanda could not be recognized as a woman because she was not able to get pregnant and accused Defazio of replacing her genitalia with a “plastic vagina.” Because judges related sex to people’s reproductive potency, the courts determined that María Fernanda was incapable of fertilizing a woman because Defazio had provided her with vast doses of estrogen that “atrophied” her testicles. Defazio repeated to the media that he helped only *hermafroditas* and that his objective was “to make interventions for the benefit of the people and to include them in a society that had marginalized them.” (This wasn’t true; he also treated other people.) He stated that intersexuals had “two sexes” to adapt, “considering their physique’s [reproductive] inclination.”¹²¹ That same year a prosecutor started a legal case against Francisco Defazio for “mutilating his patients,” based on a 1944 decree that restricted medical interventions that led to sterilization, making him into one of the national icons of biomedical sex change.¹²² Defazio was imprisoned for three years, accused of performing at least three sterilizing surgeries. More than a year later, a judge exonerated Defazio under the belief that judges were not competent to judge medical decisions. After that, Defazio

left the country and moved to the US, where he continued his work.¹²³

During the 1960s the struggle between medicine and law for control over modifications to the body intensified in both the courts and the media. In 1965 a group of doctors performed a surgery that drew significant public attention. The police imprisoned three doctors and a nurse accused of practicing clandestine surgeries and violating the regulations over medical practices that restricted interventions that caused sterilization. Gloria, a young classical dancer in the Colón National Theater, paid 1,200,000 Argentine pesos (\$2,934 USD, the equivalent of about \$24,264 USD today) for a treatment that began with the ingestion of estrogen and ended with a vaginoplasty that involved a team of ten professionals. Gloria forged new documents in order to avoid future problems, and some months later she went to court to request legal recognition of her gender. The judge denied the request again and initiated legal prosecution against the three doctors. One year later the court sentenced the doctors to three years in prison; however, perhaps because policies against sex change were still not explicit, the doctors were able to appeal and to have the trial dismissed.¹²⁴

In 1966, one year after the court case against the medical professionals who operated on Gloria, the state of Buenos Aires province explicitly prohibited people from dressing as the “opposite sex,” with a penalty of thirty days in prison—something similar to the city of Buenos Aires’s penalty for dressing as the opposite sex, since 1932. During this epoch, Luis Margaride became famous as a police chief for leading campaigns against “amorality” by conducting raids to imprison homosexuals, prostitutes, the urban poor, and young heterosexual couples, as well as by controlling theaters and cinemas with a system of censorship.¹²⁵ Not coincidentally, in 1967 the Juan Carlos Onganía dictatorship expanded the previous legislation from 1944, which prohibited doctors from providing treatment that affected reproductive organs, to a ban on any surgery related to sex change. While the most explicit law of 1967 was in part a reaction to the Defazio scandal of 1965, it also expressed the place that the

military leaders gave to populating the nation as a strategic task for national development, placing the idea of morality and decency as core values of their political discourse and conceptualizing the body as a territory of war.¹²⁶

These debates can also be read in the context of the Cold War, during which sexuality became a scenario of struggle for defining the nature of social order. In 1963 the moderate Arturo Illia won a non-free election in which military forces guaranteed the proscription of the Peronist party to participate in elections. In this scenario many Peronist voters decided either to support Illia or to spoil their ballots. Illia's government was characterized by complete control of the military forces and a lack of broader political legitimacy. In 1966 two governmental decisions—a law regulating pharmaceutical pills, which created a confrontation with multinational pharmaceutical companies, and the relaxation of the Peronist proscription that allowed the Peronist party to participate in the provincial elections—led to a military coup that interrupted democratic life. Even if Illia never interrupted the policies of urban control that affected sexual dissidents and sex workers, the new military government took the issue of public morality to a new level and empowered the police even more. The government reacted to the increasing public visibility of homosexuals, travestis, and transsexuals in the cities and the media, which they understood to be just another symptom of the national moral decay created by the popular classes' intervention in politics through Peronism. The new dictatorship, led by Juan Carlos Onganía, intensified the control of public morality as a tool to modulate the national future.

Francisco Defazio, portrayed by newspapers as “the mutilating doctor,” was a member of the first group of specialists who sought to deploy gender-affirmation treatments. Even though he did not represent the mainstream ideas of the medical elite, Defazio was far from being a marginal physician: he was the chief surgeon in the Emergency Department at the Hospital de Clínicas at the University of Buenos Aires. He was also a lecturer at the same university and dean of the private University of the West.¹²⁷ Disciples of the famous

surgeon Ricardo Finochietto, a group of specialists made up of Clemente Rodríguez Jáuregui, Alejandro Pavlosky, Ricardo San Martín, and Defazio developed the first surgical treatments for sex change in the country. During the criminal accusations against them, the patients of these renowned specialists described various hormonal treatments with which they embodied female features, such as the development of breasts or the reduction of body hair and physiognomies considered masculine, such as the growth of beards.¹²⁸ The court case would be so important that it would continue for decades, at the center of the debate in the specialized literature and among activists.¹²⁹ For example, as seen in [chapter 5](#), the activist Karina Urbina, one of the first to organize demonstrations for the right to sex change in the 1990s, was well informed about Defazio's trajectory.¹³⁰



Figures 2.7 and 2.8. *Así*, May 4, 1965. Archivos Desviados. Comic 1: “I didn’t have enough money for the full surgery.” Comic 2: “Sex? I don’t know. I was operated on by Doctor Defazio.”

Newspapers played a vital role in mediating the struggle between science, law, and trans desire to a broader audience during the 1960s. While spectacularization marked some bodies as desirable (for example, that of the French star Coccinelle), creating a horizon of meaning for those in transition, at the same time the media marked other bodies as artificial tricks, portraying them as freaks beyond the human condition. The formation of this distinction was defined by class and racial prescriptions. For certain journalists, some white bodies could become desirable with medical help. However, not all journalists legitimated these medical interventions. For example, the cartoons above, from 1965, underscored the idea that doctors could not transform people's deepest gender. As I show in the following sections, journalists—as well as doctors and policy makers—usually restricted sex to the subjects' reproductive potency. In every interview they forced people to say whether they could have children according to their new sex, a question that, for example, Liliana avoided answering by making jokes.

The Defazio affair impacted the press's approach to techniques of embodiment and spread biotechnological sex change treatments. Beyond the banning of sex-change practices, the case fostered a new popular narrative that explained gender transitions as an expression of nature's mistake that medicine could fix. This can be seen in the example of Marta, who was born in 1917 in Mar del Plata, the biggest city on the coast of Buenos Aires province. The city was known for its tourist attractions, first for elites during the early twentieth century, and later for workers. When she was forty-eight years old, in 1965, Marta was interviewed by a journalist. She recounted that her parents had raised her as a girl, and for that reason "I have grown up with more female than male psychological and physical characteristics, that is the origin of my suffering." Marta appropriated the idea of being born in the wrong body because she had been raised as the opposite sex, and with this she tried to achieve social endorsement for her transition. She was an educated person trained in classical music, who performed piano concerts in Montevideo, Santiago, Buenos Aires, Rosario, and Mar del Plata. She became the owner of a music institute, where she taught piano to her

young students. Her apparent success suggests that the students' parents recognized her as a respectable woman and allowed their children to be under her instruction.

Social class was a platform for Marta's public portrayal as a respectable woman, who greeted the journalist dressed in an "elegant dress and jewelry," in an apartment characterized by its "feminine environment [. . .] Marta has the typical grooming of a woman replenished with makeup, creams, and perfumes, as well as what she has in her bedroom."¹³¹ The journalists photographed Marta playing the piano. In contrast with Marina, who was working-class, Marta was not forced to show her "true sex," and she had more control over her self-representation. She embodied the figure expected of a woman of her age, the makeup, the short feminine haircut, the rings, and earrings. She gave her own photographic portrait to journalists to control her representation in the media. In a way, she used her private life as a political tool to claim her right to access treatments reserved for cisgender women.

When she reached the age of majority, Marta started visiting physicians, seeking to affirm her gender. She was able to buy new documents and a birth certificate illegally, helped by her lawyer and a public servant, but the journalist remarked that the papers "had dubious legal value." Marta's public understanding and practices were linked to the emergence of new conceptions of gender embodiment. After doing her hormone treatment, Marta went through several surgeries: the first one for the nose and feminine facial features, and the second to extract her testicles. The latter consisted of the application of a "plastic vagina," with which she became a "full woman." All of these procedures were very expensive: the first cost 19,000 pesos (\$489 USD, a value of \$4,044 USD today), and the second 500,000 pesos (\$3,333 USD, or \$27,128 USD today)—an amount beyond the possibility of any working-class person. For example, in hotels, the principal commerce in Marta's home city of Mar del Plata, an employee could earn between 1,800 and 3,400 pesos a month, depending on tips.¹³² After her surgeries Marta went to court to get legal papers as a woman. In 1968, three

years after her sex-change surgery, police officers arrested Marta while she was working in a beauty salon. Even though she was just offering a face massage, a client accused her of performing illegal medical practices.¹³³

Even if not every trans person wanted to have surgery to affirm their gender, the popularization of this idea would profoundly change the meaning of “sex change.” In her later adulthood, the technologies deployed by Marta were part of the growing popularization of new devices such as surgeries, hormones, and silicone, which achieved public attention in the 1960s and 1970s. The consolidation of biotechnological procedures did not replace other technologies, such as cotton, rubber, or clothing. However, journalists, policy makers, and doctors started paying more attention to biotechnological interventions than did trans people, who did not always look for these procedures or combined them in alternative ways.

The ongoing battle in the specialized and popular press illustrated the growing controversy over the definition of “sex.” Tensions surrounding the boundaries in the description of legal sex were part of the progressive distinctions between medical and legal discourses, and the legal value of sex in the access of social, legal, and civil rights. For a growing group of doctors, it was no longer sufficient to reduce sex to genitalia. Instead, they believed that “chromosomic, gonadic, hormonal, genital, civil, psychological and social” elements had to be considered. Doctors performed hormonal tests to define the “dominant sex” as the essential component along with genitalia.¹³⁴ In contrast, for the courts, legal sex was based on external appearance and, internally, genitals with potential capabilities for human reproduction.¹³⁵ For the magistrates, healing in this arena could aim at treating only the mind of the patient and not the body, and so they believed that the practices of sexual transformation constituted a crime with three problems: the patient was unable to give consent; reproduction was considered an object of national sovereignty; and the bad will of the physician determined whether they should be considered guilty or not.¹³⁶

These doctors' legal prosecution shows the lack of consensus in the medical field about these new conceptions of sex and the potential transformation of bodies. Some judges channeled policy makers, journalists, and other doctors' concerns about how these practices were allegedly threatening the nation's development. They also engaged some scientific voices that insisted that genitalia were the only criterion to determine people's sex. In this sense the diverse scientific field was at the same time acting as an agent of destabilization and stabilization of sex, legitimating and undermining its definition. For example, a court accused Ricardo San Martín and Clemente Rodríguez Jáuregui of performing surgeries on three patients, one of them a legal minor.¹³⁷ San Martín did not hide his commitment to developing these treatments. When he presented some of his studies at Salvador University, a private upper-class institution where he was a professor, some of his colleagues accused him of being crazy. This legal struggle had a relevant impact both in the press and in the legal debates surrounding the limits of medical intervention and individual desire over embodiment.

The courts defined clear limits to medical practice and defined a jurisprudence of state sovereignty over people's genitalia and reproductive capacity. The legal discussion was whether patients could consent to genital surgery. For the judges, the duty of medicine was to cure, so by considering transsexuality a disease, the doctors had to offer a treatment to normalize the body more than to transform it. For the judges, transsexuals' desire was an artificial fabrication of their disease that doctors should not accept literally. The main reason for this restriction was that for jurists, genitalia were protected by the state for their having a potential impact on human reproduction (and for that reason, on national development). In other words, they understood that genitals were a state-owned good to be preserved for the common good.¹³⁸

The prosecutor considered that the doctors committed social damage by limiting the reproductive capacity of human beings.¹³⁹ The jurist Terán Lomás stated that "an individual cannot own a good

that is of social and public interest.” Terán considered that the reproductive potency of genitalia was a national good over and above individuals’ rights over their bodies. Thus, Argentine law considered genitalia a “protected object that belongs to the society [. . .] an unavailable good.” This is why the judges described this crime as causing severe injuries.¹⁴⁰

The other legal debate was to define whether the doctors had acted guided by good or bad will. A review of the jurisprudence shows that there was no clear consensus on this issue. While some prosecutors requested serious sentences to sanction professionals, some judges preferred to forgive them. In this context, under the threat of staying in jail, doctors deployed argumentative tactics to avoid legal punishment. For example, some of them sought legal presumption of lying about the claim that the patient was intersex and, in cases of vaginoplasty, that they had penile cancer.¹⁴¹ However, doctors’ attempts encountered a limit in the accusations deployed by other health professionals who distrusted their treatments. For example, in 1958, Dr. San Martín performed surgery under the premise of alleged penis cancer, so the patient’s health care insurance paid for it. However, the doctor who helped Dr. San Martín during the procedure testified that the genitalia were normal and that the surgery did not cure any anomalies.¹⁴²

In the decades following the Defazio trial, some people went to the courts intending to perform their new corporeality in a legal gender expression and their requests were always rejected by local judges, who didn’t recognize their transformation as real. Maybe because of the increasing attention the newspapers and magazines paid to this legal struggle, a small group of people went to court to change their names in the following decade. In 1974 a twenty-year-old man called Xavier requested a judge to register his name. After years living in the United States, after some time under a testosterone treatment, and pursuing a phalloplasty, he expressed to the judge his desire to be recognized as a man and to marry his girlfriend.¹⁴³ The same year, a thirty-five-year-old woman named Lucía, a German citizen who immigrated to Argentina when she was fourteen years old, requested

that a judge change her documents to have her chosen name legally recognized. She explained the situation as the effect of a long life raised as a female “playing with dolls and using my mother’s clothing.”¹⁴⁴ In 1978 María, twenty-seven years old, asked a judge to change her documents. As they did with Xavier, journalists expressed their astonishment at the complainant’s features. They described her as “a young blonde lady with beautiful features.”¹⁴⁵ In 1979 Ramón requested permission from a judge for a complete sex-change procedure and a name change, which the doctors and the judge understood to indicate a psychiatric disorder. The courts rejected all these requests. Judges understood such medical treatments to be artificial; one of them wrote in sentencing that X “is a man and will remain so until the day of his death.” Nature was an unchangeable order for judges, and the state should put a clear limit on scientific attempts at modifying this condition. That is why the law allowed only the performance of “corrective surgeries” with which doctors expected to perfect the “true sex” of an intersexual body.¹⁴⁶

In conclusion, the national debate about biomedical sex-change treatments was a vehicle to popularize a new range of gender-affirmation practices for people who demanded to be recognized by their self-perceived gender. Likewise, the concerns surrounding human reproduction as a core value of the nation provoked new legislation that banned such practices. Moreover, by attracting the attention of judges and policy makers, a struggle ensued for the definition of state sovereignty over people’s bodies.

* * *

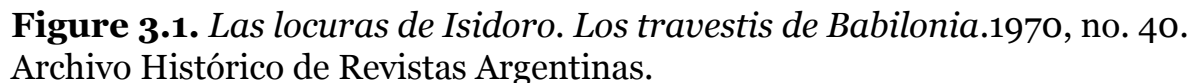
This chapter explores the conceptual, legal, and social conflicts around sex change in its transition from popular understandings based on impersonation and clothing to biomedical treatments. It focuses on two dimensions of this process: attempts to regulate the changing notion of sex, and the male and female repertoires of embodiment. As the cultural critic Gabriel Giorgi wrote, “Sex is the

theatre of the political.”¹⁴⁷ More than a medical debate, the politicization of sex change condensed anxieties about broader social transformations. Attempts at policing condensed the key role that elites assigned to reproduction as a feature for national development, as well as the conflictive conceptions of sexual morality as a metaphor for social order.

The construction of sex change was both a medical and a legal procedure. The popularity of narratives about people changing sex, along with the development of new medical technologies and concepts that transformed the notion of sex, created conflicts around defining the limits of gender embodiment. By analyzing the conflicts between journalists, policy makers, and doctors, I have described how divergences regarding the definition of sex led to an authoritarian state intervention over people’s genital sovereignty.

By exploring the male and female embodiment repertoires of a generation that lived between the decline of sexual inverts and the public disruption of travestis in the 1970s, the chapter shows different articulations of medical and handcrafted technologies with which these people affirmed their gender. This was a universe of gender embodiment that, as I explain in [chapters 3](#) and [4](#), would change between the 1960s and 1980s.

The Global Making of Travestis' Popular Culture and Everyday Technologies



In 1970 the popular comic *Las locuras de Isidoro* (Isidoro's Follies) published the issue "Las travestis de Babilonia" (The Travestis of Babilonia). The comic's main character, Isidoro, portrays an Argentine playboy who uses different strategies, such as being supported by his rich uncle, to be able to afford his lifestyle without formal employment. Isidoro loves women and drinking in bars, and he represents male desire to avoid adult commitments.¹ In *Las travestis de Babilonia*, Isidoro tries to put on a show by contracting some fugitive travestis persecuted by Babilonia's government.

Unable to find this group, he replaces them with some cisgender vedettes.² However, the real travestis find Isidoro's show and force him to include them. The contrast between travestis and cisgender women on the stage represented tensions between "real" and "fake" femininity.

The reference to travestis in a popular magazine bought by adults and children was not a crazy idea of the authors, Tulio Lovato and Mariano Juliá y Faruk. During the 1960s and 1970s, articles, interviews, and photographs about travestis and transsexual people flooded the tabloids. *Travestis artistas* (publicly identified as male actors who dressed in female costumes) and travestis (those who adopted a female identity in their everyday lives) became popular characters, a new zone where homosexuality, effeminacy, and transvestism became progressively and publicly more distinguished one from another in the 1960s/1970s.³

This Isidoro comic is a symptom of the new leading role that travestis achieved in popular culture in these years. Against a common cultural understanding that has depicted the culture of travestis and transsexual people as marginal, I will analyze how their participation in mainstream popular culture was essential in shaping a more stable language around identity and bodily knowledge. This chapter explores how different spaces—from theaters to public street performances, such as carnivals—acted as a platform for body and language experimentation in which travestis and transsexual people participated in a renewed identity metamorphosis and redefined their place in society.

This Isidoro comic is a good example of two processes in the configuration of travestis' experience. First, it represented the competition between travestis to *ser real* (to be real or authentic) in the achievement of femininity. *Ser real* or *natural* was a flexible concept that changed over time. While in the 1960s some associated it with those who creatively managed to exploit their feminine features without medical intervention, over time the press increasingly related it to medically assisted embodiment (stories of medicalization that ran in parallel to the kind of histories in [chapter](#)

2). As was also common in the media, the comic used the male article *los* in front of the noun *travestis* to emphasize the idea that they had a “secret” fake body, a male biology under a female costume. In the comic, the travesti character comments on the differences between him and the “authentic women.” The emergence of *travestis artistas* played a role in the differentiation of travestis’ everyday female embodiment. The focus on these spectacles and the open competition for authenticity connect the social universes mediated by the quest for class respectability. Performers created boundaries between travestis in theaters and those who sold sex on the street. However, these universes were connected. Indeed, the construction of a broad audience created a synergy that sustained the shows and drove the popularization of bodily transformations. Secondly, the fictional Babilonia could be a reference to the Brazilian travesti show *Les Girls* that had circulated in Argentina and captivated the press’s attention since 1967. Journalists’ descriptions of Brazilian travesti spectacles transformed Argentine variety theater shows. I argue that the global circulation of these images expanded the 1940s medical conceptualization that I analyze in [chapter 2](#) by creating a new shared travesti experience.

This double process is key to understanding the formation of travesti identity. In this chapter I argue that the global circulation of theater performances, local shows, press articles, and books contributed to the renovation of travestis’ interpretation of mainstream corporeal culture. The making of this rich and diverse visual universe was a platform of hybridization with which body knowledge and technologies articulated new meanings about the making of gender experience, and the progressive elaboration of a more stable identity.⁴ This global cultural phenomenon about travestis’ spectacles profoundly transformed Argentine culture. The images of travestis as beautiful artists, and journalists’ narratives about how these artists transformed their bodies, changed the idea of becoming a travesti into a potentially desirable possibility.⁵ Even though travestis were socially marginalized and portrayed as

anomalies, the press placed body transformation technologies and practices into public discussion.

Hybridization and circulation shed light on experiences that connected spaces like Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Europe, and the Andean zone in northern Argentina.⁶ Although I focus on the material cultural flow, travestis' and transsexuals' mobilities overlapped multiple dimensions, including (a) the translation of knowledge and popular medical practices, such as the production of the industrial-silicone breast in Brazil in the 1980s and 1990s, as I detail further in [chapter 4](#);⁷ (b) migration and travel to countries such as Chile or the United States to access gender-affirmation treatments that were prohibited in Argentina; (c) the circulation of artists, photographs, films, and magazine articles about travestis; and (d) exile to avoid the constant repressive action of the state. Likewise, circulation shows that Argentine identities were relatively autonomous from the European and North American vocabulary of sexual dissidence. The focus on transnational mobility helps us pay attention also to how the South American vocabulary impacted local identity experiences. This means that we should understand the shifting and overlapping languages in which this transnational dialogue formulated languages to make sense of Argentine travestis' experiences.

Cutuli and Insausti have pointed out that the decades of the 1960s and 1970s were crucial in the porous relationship between maricas and travestis, a turning point in multiple trans narratives about the definition of a more stable identity.⁸ This chapter contributes to this perspective by showing how the hybridization of the local and global circulation of meanings created a mutable articulation between technologies of embodiment and gender identities. The public portrayal of travestis' body experimentation and global circulation also played a vital role in shaping notions of beauty related to whiteness and nationhood, as well as in contributing to a further racialization of travestis in the following decades with their association to northern Argentine provinces.⁹

Moreover, bodily practices such as the progressive use of hormones, cotton, and surgery converged with new meanings of embodiment and created internal hierarchies between those considered real and inauthentic. As I go into in greater depth in [chapter 4](#), during the 1960s and 1970s community embodiment practices were regulated by the high value of “natural realness.” During the 1980s the development of silicone self-injection created a new boundary to deciding who was considered a real travesti. Likewise, these enabled new opportunities of negotiation with a broader public about how travestis’ bodies should be read.

The chapter has three sections. The first analyzes the global circulation of shows and references from Brazil and France, as well as local relations with these narratives. Second, I reconstruct the public struggles between local artistic transvestism and daily travesti embodiment. Finally, the focus turns to Carnival as a space of hybridization of local cultures and an essential ritual of travesti life.

Hybrid Existences: Global Travestis in Mainstream Culture

In the mid-sixties, travestis became significant characters on the Argentine urban theatrical circuit. With unprecedented coverage in the media, the land of international travesti spectacles in Buenos Aires showed a transformation in mainstream culture that was expressed in the interest of the tabloids. Notwithstanding the moralistic attempts of the state to regulate those bodies considered dangerous and immoral, the Argentine audience was thirsty for representations of these bodies. This demand demonstrates that social expectations did not always align with moralistic state regulations. Within the rules of heterosexual erotics, there existed a process of flexibilization, one that allowed integrating certain travestis into mainstream culture under certain conditions. In the coming years, this interest would move between rejection and desire, morbid curiosity and eroticism.

During the sixties and seventies, state persecution against gender transgressions intensified. As this book shows, the classic historical

periodization that organized Argentine history into periods of democratic life versus military interruptions fails to notice that the state restrictions that affected maricas and travestis make these distinctions problematic. As I point out in [chapter 1](#) and explore in greater depth in [chapter 5](#), since 1932 different local governments (military and civil) had empowered policemen to restrict travestis, transsexuals, homosexuals, sex workers, and urban poor people from freely using public spaces.

During the 1960s the language of the Cold War gave a new dimension to public morality; policing public expressions of sexuality became a synonym of building social order expressed in the reinforcement of local police regulations. Intensifying moral politics was one of the many repressive policies with which military governments responded to a convulsive scenario to build what they understood as social order. The proscription of Peronists from electoral participation after the military coup of 1955 increased widespread popular resistance to the attempts of the military regime (1955–58).¹⁰ Moreover, in 1959 the Cuban Revolution was a turning point that inspired thousands of Latin American leftist activists to seek a radical transformation of the world, many of them participating in leftist armed groups.¹¹ This volatile scenario would be characterized by fragile civil governments interrupted by other military interventions under the premise of stopping any possible communist threat. A good example of this is the backlash against Arturo Frondizi—a candidate from the Civil Radical Party elected after making a pact with Juan Domingo Perón, who was in exile—elected in 1958 and overthrown in 1962 by a civil-military coup that accused Frondizi of collaborating with Cuba. Another case, as I discuss in the last chapter, is that of Arturo Illia, elected in 1963, who also was overthrown in 1966 by Juan Carlos Onganía.

As stated previously, even if these disruptions blur when we focus on the continuity of policies of sexual prosecution against nonconforming sexualities in public spaces, Juan Carlos Onganía's dictatorship of 1966 was overemphatic. By putting public morality at the core of its political discourse, Onganía escalated police raids and

empowered police to carry out other repressive measures.¹² The seventies would not be any better. After a short period of relaxation of moral control that started with Alejandro Agustín Lanusse—the head of the dictatorship that replaced Onganía in 1971—and continued into the so-called democratic spring in which the Peronist Héctor José Campora in 1973 was elected, the return of Juan Domingo Perón and his wife, Isabel Martínez de Perón, to power opened a new cycle of conservative sexual politics. From 1974 onward the government deployed illegal violence to address the open conflict between leftist and rightist factions. After Juan Domingo Perón died, in 1974, Isabel, now his widow, became the first woman to head a government in the Americas. She articulated conservative values and reforms that threatened the conditions of the working classes, which led to further social conflict. The exaltation of conservative sexual policies led to a short prohibition of the commercialization of methods of contraception, in 1974. In 1976 the military forces launched a coup against the government and initiated a bloody regime that would last until 1983. During this time, by kidnapping and disappearing more than 30,000 citizens based on a political persecution of trade unionists and members of leftist organizations, the government founded a regime based on fear and promoted the first liberal economic reforms, such as market deregulation, while banning all social organizations.¹³

However, even as the state insisted on moralistic restrictions, Argentine urban centers underwent a broader cultural erotic transformation, creating new audiences. The sixties and seventies were characterized by the relaxation of norms around heterosexual relationships and the popularization of the contraceptive pill, which separated pleasure from reproduction.¹⁴ Likewise, media attention on youth as a new actor of modernization that condensed national social, sexual, and political conflicts reached a peak.¹⁵ Buenos Aires had a huge appetite for talking about eroticism and politics, about *guerrilleros* and travestis.

The arrival of these spectacles from abroad created a space of dialectical translation between local and global trends. The

unprecedented media presence of foreign travesti artists in the Argentine tabloid press showed just how quickly gender-transgression practices were changing. It highlighted the slow stabilization of an identity and the development of new practices of embodiment. At the same time that it made visible how technologies such as hormones were transforming lives, it stimulated a new language with which to make sense of them. The bodies of these artists became public living laboratories with which the media developed a discourse for their audience to make sense of nonconforming gender experiences and popularized their practices of embodiment. As I show in the following section, the impact of these international shows opened a transition led by the emergence of *travestis artistas*, a category with which the media would try to distinguish between bodies that were accepted and those that were rejected, based on racial and class distinctions, which sometimes could be considered even more important than gender transgressions.

As Lucía Cytryn has shown, the most famous Brazilian travesti variety show arrived in the Argentine newspapers and magazines in 1967. The group Les Girls was performing in Montevideo when Argentine journalists discovered them and started advertising them in Buenos Aires. In the context of the moralistic campaigns deployed by the Onganía regime, the idea of a show of this nature in Buenos Aires was incredible.¹⁶ Les Girls were a total revolution of Rio de Janeiro's nightlife and an inspiration for a generation of travestis in South America. Founded in 1964 by seven travestis, including the famous Divine Valeria and Rógeria, the group quickly became a hit that attracted a broad middle- and upper-class audience. In the following years, the first cast was renewed to include new travestis, such as Ira, Claudia, Teo, Carla, Yeda, Suzy, Akiko, and Sarita. The show consisted of a comedy in which a group of travestis were analyzed by a psychiatrist; as part of the performance, the artists sang, played music, and danced in tropical costumes. Les Girls recorded a music album in 1966,¹⁷ and their show became a big

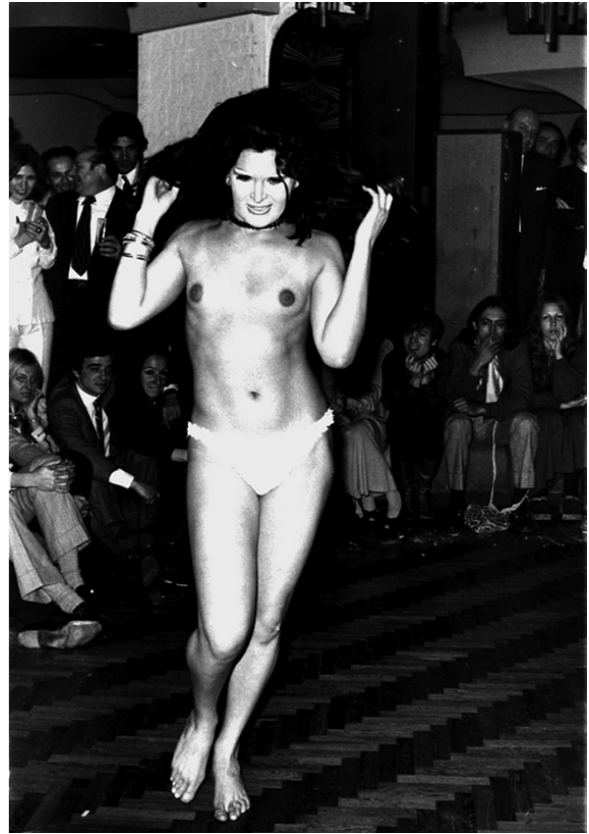
success in Brazil. The performer Divina Valeria took her act to Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay.¹⁸

Les Girls waited four years to perform in Buenos Aires. In 1971 Enrique Monzón, a famous journalist, organized a private party for a “special audience” to enjoy the tropical fun. The press was surprised and asked, “How would they deal with the strict control of the police morality department?”¹⁹ The Brazilian artists performed the show at midnight at Rugantino, a psychedelic subfloor designed by a team of Italian architects.²⁰ It was difficult to organize; one of the main characters—Divina Valeria—got into the country camouflaged as part of a Uruguayan *murga*, a group performing traditional music and dance from the River Plate cultural zone. That same year they got a contract to take part in a variety show in the National Theater, one of the main venues in the city. Les Girls benefited from a slight relaxation of the moral controls. In 1971 Alejandro Agustin Lanusse—the military officer who replaced Juan Carlos Onganía as head of the dictatorial regime—opened a transition to the redemocratization of the country. In his attempts to portray Argentina as a modern country, he attended the first presentations of Les Girls and authorized them to continue to perform in the country.²¹

The excitement produced by these shows combined fear, morbid curiosity, and desire for those bodies publicly portrayed as anomalies. These performances affected new audiences seeking erotic spectacles by pushing moral limits and created alternative representations from people that were usually restricted to the criminal section of the newspapers. The extensive fame that the cast achieved after the first clandestine performances reflects the emergence of a broad cross-class audience: people of low incomes, middle classes, working-class men, and members of the elite fell under the power of the hypnotic transgressive show. The photographs of the semiclandestine performance of a 1971 show an uncomfortable audience, nervous and excited. Some of them are laughing or trying to avoid the camera, but they also focus on the mixture of tropical music, fantastic costumes, and dancers. They are not sitting in seats, as is usual for a theater presentation. The crowd

is standing on the floor watching the travestis dance. For many in the audience, this may have been their first face-to-face interaction with travestis. It is difficult to imagine how they reacted to the exposure to such bodies, which were usually narrated with mockery by the press or treated as anomalies by medicine. The viewers seem to be timid in the face of that naked body with long hair and the female silhouette that challenged their notion of womanhood.²²

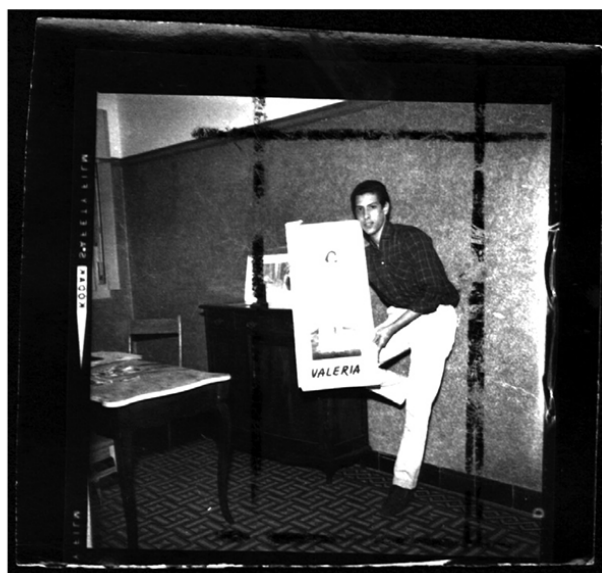
The media hypervisibility transformed Les Girls into public living laboratories. On the one hand, the translation of those bodies, which were considered foreigners to the local sexual culture, was vital to recreating social distinctions between the expected morality of Argentine audiences and the alleged sexual abnormality of the show. On the other hand, this attention shows how the conflictive process of stabilization of travestis' identity language and biotechnological embodiment practices spread in the media, and made available possible languages and paths for female body affirmation.



Figures 3.2 and 3.3. Photographs of Les Girls (1971). *Left:* Presentation in the National Theater. *Right:* Presentation in the Rugantino. Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno (Argentina). Departamento de Archivos. Fondo Editorial Sarmiento. Subfondo Crónica. Sección Archivo. Subsección Archivo de redacción. Serie Sobres temáticos. ARO0105346.

During those four years, Les Girls' bodily experience changed. In their first appearance in the Buenos Aires media in 1967, they took pictures dressed as men and as women, to showcase their dual "nature." In one of these photos, Valeria holds a poster announcing her performance, highlighting the contrast between her "male" and "female" figures. In a recent interview, some of the members explained that during those years, some of them preferred only to *montarse* (put on drag) for the shows, while others were reinforcing their permanent female embodiment.²³ The show relied on large wigs and costumes to embody the dancers' female performance. In 1967 they promoted themselves as "men in daily life and women on the stage," as other travestis artistas stated, so that they could

distinguish themselves from the everyday travestis pathologized by the press. In the next decade, the same actresses exchanged their costumes for their body modification. In a period of four years, they developed their female realness. In 1967 they talked in interviews about how they produced their silhouettes, hips, and breasts.²⁴ In contrast, in the image of 1971, the actress shows her breasts, which have been produced by hormones. She makes them public as an expression of the power of her technological transformation. In the 1971 interviews, the performers do not hide the impressions of the marvelous power of hormones to “correct” or “drive” their female nature. In addition they told journalists that they waxed their bodies to erase traces of masculinity.²⁵ Les Girls is a good example of travestis’ living experimentation. Like many of their peers, they tested the limits of gender with their bodies. According to the press, one of the performers and costume designers died in Montevideo by inadvertently intoxicating himself with excessive hormone consumption.²⁶



Figures 3.4 and 3.5. Photographs of Les Girls (1967). *Left:* Les Girls Drag Performance. *Right:* Valeria showing her poster. Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno (Argentina). Departamento de Archivos. Fondo Editorial Sarmiento. Subfondo Crónica. Sección Archivo. Subsección Archivo de redacción. Serie Sobres temáticos. AR00105346.

These changes between the 1967 and 1971 images and interviews with Les Girls in Buenos Aires reflect a fundamental change in Brazil. In that country the 1960s and 1970s were a period of transition in which a wide group of people who had previously identified as *bichas*—an equivalent of the Argentine *maricas*—began to identify themselves as travestis.²⁷ They stopped separating their artistic and personal lives and began to embody female personhood fully. Inspired by their travels to Europe, in particular to France, some travestis and *bichas* were introduced to the concept of transsexuality.

If their breasts surprised journalists and the public, they were also a total revelation for the local marica and gender-nonconforming community. This was a new administration of intimate technologies with which they provided new narratives to read bodily transformations and more stable meanings of femininity. Evelyn, whom the press portrayed as the “most beautiful Argentine travesti,” declared that “Les Girls brought travestism to Argentina.” Within the decade Evelyn would become a renamed travesti artista, the second gender-impersonator to perform in the National Theater company in 1977. According to his website and recent interviews, “*Evelyn* is the stage name of Jorge Pérez, an Argentine female impersonator.” For that reason I use male pronouns to refer to Jorge Pérez and his female impersonation, a figure that was central for the local trans community.²⁸ In 1974 Evelyn appeared elaborately dressed in a magazine talking about his future presentations, which included singing and dancing.²⁹ Beyond the push of the popularization of hormones, these incursions into the media spread the idea that people could transform their bodies. However, the high costs and limitations of a state-restricted market, as described in [chapter 4](#), encouraged experimentation with different techniques, ranging from the use of cotton or foam rubber to the injection of liquid silicones banned for human use.³⁰

Les Girls expressed the global making of travesti culture in Argentina on two levels. First, their name shows the mixture of artistic traditions and languages: *les* is a plural nongendered French

article, and the word *girls* highlighted the American influence of cross-dressing performances. Before travestis consolidated the term as a stable identity, the word was related to medical discourse. Moreover, in the late nineteenth century, French artistic practices circulated in Buenos Aires, as explained in [chapter 1](#). The press translated *Les Girls* as “Los travestis,” a strategy used to point out the performers’ male “biology.” Beyond the stigmatizing use of the Spanish male article, the definition was a metaphor for the travestis’ bodies. The performers combined female figures by highlighting their breasts and hips without seeking any genital surgery to adjust themselves to the expected body for their self-perceived gender. In addition, Les Girls’ global mobility points to how circulation shaped travestis’ popular culture. The group’s protagonist, Rogéria, traveled to perform in Luanda, Barcelona, and Paris during the mid-1970s, where she formed a closer relationship with Coccinelle, who would also deeply influence Argentina’s travesti culture. After gaining stardom in Europe, Rogéria returned to Brazil as an international star and became the first travesti actress in a national soap opera on primetime TV.³¹ The repressive environment that punished travestis pushed them to try their luck on the old continent, where these performances had a long tradition. Divina Valeria traveled to Uruguay and performed in the seaside tourist town of Punta del Este, then she went to Spain, but the repressive control of the Franco regime explicitly prohibited that kind of show.³² Cláudia Wonder became a famous travesti performer in the 1970s and traveled throughout Argentina, Chile, and Europe.³³

Transnational migration transformed travestis’ language of embodiment. The new discourses about transsexuality brought new narratives on the topic to mainstream media. Brazil became world-renowned for its travestis; during the early 1980s, the gay liberation movement journal *O lampião da esquina* photographed a group of travestis as a football team and proclaimed them to be the pride of the nation. Argentine newspapers portrayed Rio de Janeiro as the new global travesti capital.³⁴ In the same issue, they interviewed ex-members of Les Girls, who described how their European trip

changed them. Rogéria explained that she had had several treatments to improve her femininity, such as permanent waxing and a silicone breast procedure.³⁵

Thinking through the mediatization of those bodies as public laboratories shows how travesti participation in mainstream culture reshaped local sexual culture. The media collaborated in creating new meanings that activated ideas about race and sex and provided a language to make sense of those particular experiences, to define the separation between cisgender audiences and travestis' bodies, and heterosexual desire more broadly. The place of Brazil in the Argentine consciousness was crucial to this process.

Since the late nineteenth century, the idea of Brazil as a sexual racialized other, in contrast with the alleged white Hispanic Catholic culture of Argentina, had defined local desires. For example, the circulation of jokes that associated homosexuality with Brazil contrasted Argentine white male national potency to an allegedly Black and Indigenous competitor.³⁶ Travestis' bodies activated the deep racial roots of Argentine heterosexual desire, which combined complex notions of attraction and rejection. Historians of race have pointed out how the hypervisibility of sexualized Black bodies was central to portraying Argentina as a homogeneous white country, and racialized bodies as foreigners.³⁷

Brazilians' exuberant representations of female beauty through carnival culture also dialogued with the racialization of Argentine erotic desire. Les Girls photographs published in the press celebrated the racial diversity of the dancers by highlighting the Argentine imagination of Brazilian sensuality. Along with the women with blond wigs and white brunettes that matched with the flexible representation of the *morocha argentina* (Argentine woman with dark skin and/or dark hair), journalists noticed the presence of other figures, such as Akiko, who performed as a sexy geisha.³⁸ Since the 1940s Japanese and Asian migrant communities in Argentina had grown, promoted by Peronist governments; the representation of the submissive geisha—also present in early twentieth-century female impersonators—promised white male domination over Japanese

bodies.³⁹ Likewise, along with some carnival characters, such as the Bahiana—typically represented with the colored dresses and fruit crowns associated with African cultures—the press also covered the participation of Black travesti dancers. Built on a narrative of national whitening based on dominant discourses that considered Afro-Argentines “extinct” by the early twentieth century, journalists portrayed Black travesti dancers as a novelty. However, following a long tradition of racial whitening in the country, the racialized Argentinian language played a role in translating these characters for the local audience. Journalists (like many other Argentines) used flexible racial concepts to appraise travestis’ bodies and sometimes to portray them as exotic members of the national imagination. In some articles, journalists refer to dark-skinned dancers as negros (Black men) in a doubling movement that both disregarded their female performance and labeled them as foreigners in a country that portrays itself as white. But they also use more flexible terms, such as *morena* (brown skin) and *morocha* (which could refer to dark skin but also to white skin with dark hair)—sometimes with mockery and other times with desire—which integrated these dancers into the mainstream national culture.⁴⁰

While this racial language could work as an expansive shading of the dancers’ racial phenotypes or reinforce the distance with their transgressive bodies, the repeated use of the concept *morocha* engaged with the emblem of Argentine beauty that inspired travestis’ body construction: the *morocha argentina*. This figure expressed the flexibility of Argentine whitening and marked a huge part of the population, with diverse phenotypes and ethnicities, as non-Black bodies. Moreover, it was a contesting eroticization of racially mixed heritage; the figure of the *morocha* was productive for travestis who came from different regions and did not always match the expected whitened beauty standards.⁴¹ In contrast with the representation of the white mother of the nation, the *morocha argentina* symbolized the eroticism of the popular classes and fabulous female figures by tracing precolonial racialized beauty standards, such as the *mulatona*, who was defined by big hips and breasts.⁴²

Audiences played a role in transforming these spectacles in a vital space of articulation of erotic fantasies, identity, and body transformations. Beyond the state's attempts to regulate citizens' sexual desire and annul expressions of deviation, a new generation pushed public limits beyond moral censorship. This was not a challenge to those patterns: this voyeuristic consumption opened new artistic and sexual commercial circuits that usually combined moral double standards, public rejection, and a desire for consumption. Queer audiences also found community in these shows and sometimes were inspired by these stories to drive their willingness for bodily transformation. Brazilian newspapers highlighted the massive presence of Argentine tourists in Brazilian travesti shows in Rio de Janeiro, a public seeking shows forbidden in Argentina.⁴³ The memories of the Uruguayan travesti Gloria Meneses point to the presence of Argentines in the Carnival of Montevideo, looking for new erotic experiences or gender expressions outside authoritarian morality control.⁴⁴ Malva—to whom I make reference in [chapter 2](#)—was also changed by her participation in the South American artistic circuit. She worked as a dressmaker in the variety theater circuit in Buenos Aires and then, tired of the state's repressive actions, started a long tour through Brazil and Uruguay, working on the costumes of the Escolas de Samba (samba schools).⁴⁵

Brazil functioned as an oasis for escaping the local moralistic restrictions for heterosexuals, homosexuals, and travestis. While it activated a profound idea of Brazil as an uncontrollable sexual tropical force, more open and freer in practice than Argentina, it was also a space for political and sexual exile for those suffocated by local control. Brazil seemed to have more space for dissident expression of sexuality, more freedom for effeminate clothing and behavior.⁴⁶ The sociologist and poet Néstor Perlongher, former leader of the Argentine Homosexual Liberation Front, who escaped to Brazil to avoid the dictatorship following the military coup of 1976, wrote to his friends about the Brazilian paradox: a more conservative culture that offered broader sexual freedom for encounters with men.⁴⁷

As I analyze in [chapter 4](#), in the following decades Brazil became a space for technological transference among travestis. Famous for the talents of the northeastern Brazilian travestis, some Argentines traveled to Salvador da Bahia to produce their silicone breasts during the 1980s. Some of them learned homemade techniques for creating silicone breasts and hips. Likewise, Brazil became a potential audience for up-and-coming travestis looking for a wider public. Jessica Brown—a famous travesti, known for her physical similarity to the local vedette Moria Casan—performed several times in Rio and Sao Paulo. As she expressed to the press: “In countries such as Brazil, France, and the United States I am more than a transformista, I am recognized as a travesti and an artist. I can be a man, but inside, I am a woman.” She added, “In Brazil, I can work and earn money, I am a plastic production, that is why I’m a 40-28-40 figure. In Brazil, I am saving money so I can afford my surgery to become a full woman.”⁴⁸

As discussed in [chapter 2](#), France also transformed Argentine travestis’ experience. France had a wider audience for travestis to work as artists or sex workers, with more freedom than in South America; the networks for offering sexual services there, as well as in Italy, Spain, and Germany, grew quickly from the 1980s onward. Earlier, the international fame of the superstar Coccinelle (1931–2006) became a reference point for local travestis and transsexuals. The French star inverted the negative projection over travesti and transsexual bodies and transformed them into subjects of male desire, placing herself into local mainstream culture. She showed that it was possible to be a transsexual and be desired by the male audience. Several memoirs by maricas and travestis confirmed that Coccinelle was a turning point. The public devotion to her beauty and realness transformed local travestis’ notions of their bodies. Her impact on the local travesti community was so impressive that in 1962, when she landed in Buenos Aires, there was a crowd waiting for her.⁴⁹ Coccinelle deployed a challenging attitude toward local moralism. She took several pictures in sexy poses, celebrating her transformations and her beauty. That same year she performed a

striptease in Córdoba that the city government rapidly censored. Accused by the judges of sexual scandal, she replied in the press, “They can visit me in my hotel, and if they have any problem, they can contact the French embassy.”⁵⁰

Coccinelle’s beauty captivated Argentine audiences. She transformed languages about sex change, spreading the notion of *transsexuality*. She also created links between the French and local South American market. For example, she helped Rogéria, the leader of Les Girls, get work in Paris’s theaters, which allowed her to go back to Brazil as an international star. Likewise, Coccinelle’s success enhanced the idea that transsexual women could be real, sexy, and beautiful actresses. Her erotic presence (celebrated by the press) was a unique technology of intimacy that popularized biotechnological ideas of sex change. She embodied all the components of Argentine beauty standards, such as whiteness and big breasts and hips.⁵¹

The global circulation of photographs, imagery, and discourses played an important role in local travesti culture. As I point out in the following two sections, the emergence of globally visible ways of being travesti and transsexual interacted with local experiences, for example, the migration of many travestis from smaller cities and towns of northern Argentina to Buenos Aires with the hope of finding in the capital the freedom that they did not achieve in their hometowns. A hybridization of backgrounds and cultures gave a new meaning to the possibility of being a travesti in Argentina.

Between the Theaters and the Streets: Travestis Artistas, Desire, and Moralism

The global circulation of travestis’ photographs, articles, and spectacles opened space for local travestis in the mainstream cultural circuit. Various travestis enrolled in the trade union of the performing arts to perform transformismo—the name usually used to define gender impersonation—in discos and theaters.⁵² At the beginning of the 1970s, a small circuit of liberal bars in Buenos Aires, such as Hidrógeno, Teatrón, and Talero, provided a public place—sometimes homosexual, sometimes straight—for transformista

shows.⁵³ While this created economic opportunities for maricas and travestis, it also fostered a new moralistic discourse in the media that demanded that they distinguish themselves from the poor and usually racialized travestis who offered sexual services on the street. The spectacularization of travesti artistas created a terrain of struggle that produced new social and community hierarchies. Even if this was challenged by some of them, the creation of travesti artistas demanded enhancing social distinction practices, such as minimizing technological intervention. As I analyze in more depth in [chapter 4](#), this distinction fell away progressively during the 1980s with the popularization of silicone self-injections, carving out new terrain for some travestis to openly challenge media framing.

Vanessa Show was born in La Banda (Santiago del Estero) in 1950.⁵⁴ To escape from the oppression of her conservative father, while she was still under the legal age she moved to Buenos Aires, where she got a job in a restaurant. She spent weeks visiting different theaters during the Golden Age for variety shows in the late 1960s. Once she reached eighteen, she became a dancer in the National Theater. On trips with the company, she started buying feathers and clothes for making her costumes. When the famous cisgender performer Nélide Roca discovered that Vanessa was dressing as a woman to dance, she took her onto the stage. This launched Vanessa Show as Argentina's first travesti star. A year later, she was the protagonist of the show *Las vedettes son ellos*. Vanessa faced many difficulties (police violence and the curiosity of journalists, from Buenos Aires to small cabarets in the rest of the country), and she struggled to construct a strong career. By the 1970s she had launched into the European and Latin American markets.⁵⁵

The renewed portrayal of travestis' bodies as desirable or as comical, celebrated by different audiences, expanded the possible readings of their bodies. As happened with other international stars, the participation in mainstream media of artists such as Vanessa Show encouraged a new portrayal of travestis' bodies as desirable. This reading worked as an alternative for what Lohana Berkins—one of the most influential leaders of the travesti activist movement—and

Marlene Wayar defined as a “sewage identity”: since they were publicly associated with all negative social connotations, travesti bodies became deposits of social hatred, an animosity usually expressed with violence.⁵⁶ While the formation of the character of the travesti artista partially mitigated negative meanings by opening spaces previously unavailable to many of them, and while this new role could foster a space in which to be desired, it also demanded public distinction from those selling sex in the street—even if many of them worked in these same streets. Cultural artifacts of the time, such as the comic that opens this chapter, worked to create a binary between the “real,” honest cis woman and the fake, dishonest travesti sex worker, whereas in reality, cis women and travestis—not without conflicts—shared both the theaters and the streets. Because of the extensive social discrimination against travestis and very effeminate maricas, most of them were excluded from the formal job market. Many of them were migrants who abandoned their hometowns and migrated to midsize provincial cities or Buenos Aires with the hope of finding a better life. Beyond the art world, many of them eked out a living by selling sex in the streets or private apartments. In [chapter 5](#) I analyze in more depth how travestis competed for public spaces to offer sexual services, and the police and civil violence that they faced to survive. In practice, the tours of small venues around the country were not totally separated from cisgender and travesti offers of sexual services. Mayka, a prominent trans activist from Chubut (Patagonia) born in 1956, remembers something similar about the local circuit of brothels. Due to her very feminine attitude and embodiment, she was violently socially excluded from a young age. As a teenager, she started performing in a local brothel. There she worked as both a sex worker (not without resistance from the cisgender women working there) and a singer in late-night shows. After an experience as a seminarist in the Catholic Church that took her to Brazil, she returned to her hometown to pursue a life as Mayka. In the following decades, she toured local brothels singing as “Mayka, the Tropical Rage,” and has lately become a prominent activist for trans rights.⁵⁷

The unprecedented visibility of travestis artistas took travestis beyond the police to the entertainment sections of the newspapers, multiplying the public portrayal of their embodiment practices. An excellent example of this was the film *Mi novia el travesti* (1975) (*My Girlfriend the Travesti*) with the famous actors Alberto Olmedo and Susana Giménez. The government censored the film's title and forced the filmmakers to eliminate the word *travesti*. The producers consequently changed the title to *Mi novia el*, using the masculine article *el* without the noun *travesti*, a grammatical construction that omitted the offending word while still broadcasting the alleged gender contradiction encrypted in travesti existence. The authorities also prohibited the participation of the famous artist Evelyn, who was replaced by Giménez. In the film, Dominique (Giménez) simulates being a travesti to get a job in a theater. Her lover Alberto suffers pressure and jokes from friends and family who do not want him to be considered a degenerate. In the end the couple comes together when Alberto discovers that Dominique is a cisgender woman. As in the comic *Las locuras de Isidoro*, the film celebrates realness—understood as a natural and biological good—as a beauty virtue that distinguishes travestis from cisgender women.

The popularization of the travesti artista was the symbol of the formation of new markets beyond the mainstream circuits in Buenos Aires city. While Vanessa Show began her path in large, famous venues, travestis artistas performed their shows in small cabarets. In 1971 a journalist interviewed and photographed *Scandal*, a show performed in the western metropolitan area of Buenos Aires and featuring three travestis: Misty, Chispita, and Chiche. Their performance had been inspired by Brazilian music and dancing. They defined their profession as “being travestis” and expressed excitement at the promise of freedom that the end of the dictatorship could bring, with the return of Peronism to power.⁵⁸ They toured the show in small bars around Buenos Aires province, as Vanessa Show did when she felt that police officers were prosecuting her in the mid-1970s.⁵⁹

Travestis artistas created a profession called *vedette-men* that provided an economic opportunity and even a space of freedom in a repressive society. For example, La Vieja Vanesa, who performed in the cheap working-class bars, wrote that she started doing striptease in Chile during the 1970s, something that she could not perform in Argentina because the show's producers were afraid of police censorship.⁶⁰ The fact that a broader public consumed these shows as well as Les Girls, and looked for the erotic presence of travestis, expressed a slight rupture between conservative state norms and new generational cultural interests. From the late 1940s, but with more energy in the 1960s and 1970s, youth were consolidated as a social, cultural, and political actor. This generation-shifting converged with an unprecedented cultural production boom, multiplying the existing circuits for mainstream and alternative books, spectacles, films, and magazines. As Cosse points out, this young generation shaped a more flexible understanding of heterosexual contracts. In the big cities, young people accepted premarital sex and deployed renewed romantic and erotic practices, which were also resisted by the state's moralistic control.⁶¹

Indeed, the increasingly repressive actions against straight couples and young artistic expression in the sixties and seventies could be read as a state reaction to this transformation. Evelyn/Jorge Pérez quickly became a famous vedette, starting in a musical titled *Verdissimo*, on Corrientes Street, the local Broadway (1973). She continued in 1973 with *Los vecinos de Corrientes* (*The Locals of Corrientes*) and *Una noche de locura* (*A Crazy Night*), and then, after starring in some variety shows, played the main character in *Corrientes de lujo* (*Wealthy Corrientes*). Throughout these shows, Evelyn/Jorge Pérez performed alongside various acclaimed actors. Gerardo Sofovich, an important producer of Argentine variety shows, presented Evelyn as the “vedette of the travestis” or the “king of the vedettes.” After being censored multiple times—including being banned from the film *Mi novia el* (1975)—Evelyn went into exile for what would be a long time.⁶² In the 1980s Jorge Pérez worked in different shows in Brazil, Colombia, Italy, Venezuela, Spain, and the

US. In Venezuela and Spain, he was featured on the cover of several magazines and was presented as an “exhibition of the most beautiful faces of both sexes.” Finally, he moved to the United States, where he currently lives.⁶³

As happened with international shows, state agents intervened to regulate the public expression of travestis. With the Cold War in the background, police officers understood these shows as symptoms of the social deviation threatening the national future. Even though, as seen above, the media created apparent social hierarchies among travestis artistas and those who sold sex on the street, in practice many of them suffered the same repressive practices that restricted their participation in public life. While those who performed in prestigious theaters found a little more space for negotiation, they were still subjected to moral policing, which included informal practices of violence. As police increased their violence with detentions in the street as well as violent practices such as beatings in prisons, the shows of the vedettes-travestis faced more difficulties. With help from her producers, and thanks to her growing fame, Vanessa Show negotiated with the police to continue her famous shows. Nonetheless, she was imprisoned several times just for walking in the street, again demonstrating the limited distinction between famous artistas and other travestis. She was taken to the police station and denied her basic rights, such as signing documents of the accusation; she spent days in jail before being set free. By the mid-seventies, the increasingly repressive environment also reached her. The authorities put her on a blacklist, and the detentions were more frequent. To avoid this repression on the part of the Buenos Aires police, Vanessa started touring small bars and cafés in the smaller cities of other provinces.

Political and moralistic violence increased during the third Peronist government (1973–76) and especially during Isabel Martínez de Perón’s administration. Police and paralegal forces, such as the Anti Communist Alliance (AAA)—an illegal violent group coordinated by the minister of social policies, José López Rega—murdered leftist activists. These attacks were particularly directed at

the left-wing movement inside Peronism, young trade unionist members, and groups considered “subversive” for their socialist revolutionary orientation. The AAA accused Vanessa Show of being a “sexual terrorist.” She decided to go into exile, a practice to which a number of travestis artistas, such as Evelyn and others, resorted to save their lives in the moments prior to the country’s bloodiest dictatorship, which started in 1976.⁶⁴

In summary, the emergence of travestis artistas created a new economic possibility with which many travestis inserted themselves into the mainstream cultural system. However, as I explain in the following section, taking part in this cultural circuit demanded a social and moralistic distinction from other travestis working in the sexual market.

Nature: The Art of Being “Real”

As I have explained, the production of travestis artistas formulated the social distinction between publicly accepted travestis’ bodies and those considered immoral, usually based on social class and race. Publicly, travestis artistas were typically asked to formulate social distinctions in order to receive favorable media coverage. Before the popularization of silicone injections, the idea of being naturally authentic became a powerful element that produced the distinction between travestis. Travestis participated in female representation by adopting certain physical traits of female models and challenging others, interpreting and popularizing new standards of feminine beauty. In their memoirs, travestis recall their admiration for figures from mainstream theater and television. For example, in her autobiography, Vanessa Show described the cisgender woman Nélida Roca as a “natural beauty without surgery”; Susana Brunetti was “tall and blonde.” In addition, Vanessa identified herself with famous cisgender women, such as the film stars Isabel Sarli, Susana Giménez, and Moria Casan, and the Mexican actress María Félix.⁶⁵

The idea of having a natural body became powerful in travesti culture during the 1960s and 1970s, building community boundaries associated with beauty and respectability. This changed in the 1980s

when silicone became the major boundary, a point I explore in [chapter 4](#).⁶⁶ While the rapid development of biotechnological embodiment practices transformed travestis' bodily representation, travestis artistas were usually required to hide these transformations and to enhance the idea of their allegedly natural femininity on stage. As the participants in *Les Girls* demonstrated, access to these technologies changed the self-description of vedettes from maricas to travestis or transsexuals. Doctors also began to differentiate between travestis and travestis artistas by highlighting that the second group sought medical treatments to "change their sex."⁶⁷ The pictures that Vanessa Show chose for her memoirs are indicative of travestis artistas' notions of beauty in the 1960s and 1970s. The photographs, with their sexy poses, highlight her big breasts and hips, with dresses that evoke the spirit of the variety genre. All the photos engage in the codification of a model of female beauty. Moreover, in some of them, Vanessa added an epigraph that highlighted the "natural" origin of her beauty. Vanessa deemphasized waxing, silicone, and hormones in order to highlight her natural female features (similar to those of cisgender women). She also employed narrative practices to distinguish herself from other types of travestis, who were usually mocked in the press.

Naturaleza (nature) was a changing notion that expressed this conflictive moment in travesti representation, during which a hierarchical definition of beauty based on publicly minimizing body modification practices dominated. Even if being natural was a matter of honor, as seen in the following chapter, during the 1980s, *destape* (undressing)—a political and cultural moment of high sexualization of national life and a progressive openness to talking publicly about sex—transformed biotechnological practices into a major identity boundary. These statements could be read as both a way of negotiating with the journalist's moralism and as an expression of the understanding of the shifting notions of what it meant to be travesti. The following examples are possibly the result of journalists' criticism. Vanessa Show is an example of this change. In her first interviews in the early 1970s, Show defined herself as a man; she

denied using hormones (“It’s all nature, it’s mine”) and added, “I am a man, and on the stage, I am a woman, I try to do my best.”⁶⁸ Similarly, in the same period, Evelyn/Jorge Pérez said that he did not want to be confused with “degenerates” or street travestis. Evelyn/Jorge Pérez stated that “a travesti is someone that uses clothes from the opposite sex, but this word is changing, and it’s the fault of some little boys who used it to show off their defects. They dress like this in the street and even act like women; they try to impose something dirty onto this profession. [. . .] I am not interested in being a woman in my relationship; in my life, I dress how I am: Jorge María Pérez.”⁶⁹ Ana, a famous travesti from Chaco, in northern Argentina, who was well known for her participation in Carnivals, repeated this idea: “I do not want to use hormones,” clarifying that his show was “elegant [. . .] not a striptease.”⁷⁰ Chiche, a performer in the show *Scandal*, stated to the press, “I am Catholic, male or female, whatever you prefer, but I do not tolerate scandal in the street. [. . .] I feel like a man, and I admire them. I do not want to have a different sex.”⁷¹

But the rise of technologies and the changing meanings of travestismo quickly led to new expressions of identity. In this context of rapid changes, as had happened in the case of the Brazilian performers Les Girls, experiences of migration and the public portrayal of embodiment practices transformed travestis’ identity and corporeal language. While being natural continued to be valued, there was a broader transformation of the languages with which travestis made sense of their experiences in the mainstream cultural system, allowing them to publicly show how they were affirming their femininity. This would be the start of a broader process. Travestis and transsexual people—a distinctive identity that defined people seeking to affirm their identity by accessing gender-affirmation surgeries—traveled to get medical treatments, sell sexual services, and protect themselves from local violence.

Beyond the famous ones, travestis sought to escape the repressive policing that excluded them from the public sphere by creating international networks for migration. During the 1980s and 1990s,

many started traveling to Italy, Spain, Germany, France, or Sweden to sell sex in the streets and then would return to Argentina to support their friends and families with the money that they had earned abroad. According to Wayar's travesti dictionary, they were aided by *travestis traductoras* (travesti translators) who offered information about the local language, where to sell sex, and how to take care of themselves, many of them created extensive international networks of travel, work, and friendship.⁷² Travestis usually defined this process as an exile. Travestis and trans activists developed this conceptualization to dialogue with the human rights movements. While Argentines usually restricted the notion of *exiliados*—the exiled ones—to those people who escaped the violence of the last dictatorship (1976–83) for political reasons, the travesti and trans movement expanded exile to sexual and broader social reasons to define the continuity of discriminatory policies and practices that expelled them from Argentina.

This mobility also fostered knowledge about embodiment practices, as shown in the following chapter on self-injection of silicone. These travels connected travestis and transsexuals with new narratives about bodily transformation and pushed new identity definitions, such as travesti, transsexual or *mujer operada*.⁷³ This movement opened multiple paths for transiting body experiences beyond cisgendered norms. In 1986 some journalists presented Vanessa Show as “the most famous Argentine Transsexual in Europe” (even she doesn't identity herself in those terms). In reply to a question about whether she would like to pursue genital surgery, she replied, “No, but if I needed it to get my papers as a woman, I would do it, even if my partner leaves me, he told me that he would break up if I get surgery, but I am planning to get my papers in France, and I need medical treatment to be a legal woman.”⁷⁴ This statement marked a profound transformation in her identification from a travesti artist to a trans woman.

In summary, the emergence of travestis artistas participated in a broader transformation of gender-transgression body technologies and meanings. The hypervisibilization of travestis artistas as

desirable subjects was based on building a social distinction from everyday travestis, even if in daily life this was an artificial boundary. The embodiments of travesti artistas help us understand how the beauty logic that in the 1960s and 1970s was based on the idea of nature—the minimizing of gender modification practices in public—would be replaced in the 1980s with the spread of the use of self-injected silicone and access to surgeries.

The Power of Carnival: Homemade Technologies and Suspending Authoritarianism

While global circulation and local artistic translation played a role in constructing travestis' social universe, Carnival was a space of articulation in which travesti shared experiences and technologies and achieved visibility. Carnival is a popular festival, brought to the Americas at the time of Spanish colonization, producing bonds of syncretism with diverse Indigenous, Creole, and African traditions. This celebration has long allowed for the transgression of social norms of gender, class, and race—a special occasion for the expression of sexual dissidence, a terrain on which to enjoy the flexibility of hierarchies of social punishment—and was a major cultural artifact for building race and gender narratives.⁷⁵

Carnival was (and still is) a living experience of social experimentation that blurred the limits between audiences and performers and allowed people to invert social hierarchies.⁷⁶ It acted as a space for social and bodily experimentation. On the one hand, it allowed for the inversion of social hierarchies by placing marginalized bodies at the center of the audience's desire. It was a practice of freedom and enjoyment that mitigated everyday violence and opened a path for travestis' appropriation in a public space, where they were usually neglected. On the other hand, because embodiment practices also relied on their social readings, it was a space for experimentation with different materials in which homemade technology and feeling desired interacted in the formulation of gender belonging. Carnival also articulated travesti's experiences of migration and connected them with their hometown

communities. Some travestis traveled from villages to big cities in search of building a new life, gaining independence from family control, and avoiding local conservative environments. There are many stories about the suffering of being expelled from home and the search for a better life in the city, a move that generally limited travestis' opportunities for subsistence to sex work. Carnival was the popular scenario in which all travestis could become ephemeral stars despite their social background and bodies—a celebration that challenged the codes that excluded them from everyday public social life.

Carnival was a unique space for producing a fragile social belonging, finding a connection with the same audience that rejected them in their everyday lives by denying them aid when police officers abused them, a ritual of temporary inversion of the social mechanism of exclusions with which society produced cisgender citizenship. While theorizing about her experience in her hometown of Salta—one of the most Catholic regions in Argentina—Berkins affirmed, “When a society has a huge repressive mechanism, the escape points are stronger too, they can’t assimilate you, that conservative society produces a level of consciousness in the Carnivals, of delicacy, of sensibility about all that violence. It does not allow a middle point. It is the symbol of the hypocrisy of Salta: everything is there, but it is not.”⁷⁷

In contrast with the beautiful pictures of the annual Carnival, everyday life was tough. Travestis suffered cruel repression by police agents who used provincial morality codes to imprison them constantly. For example, travestis were arrested when they were buying their groceries, accused of creating public scandals. Carnival contrasted with this lack of freedom during the rest of the year. One testimony kept in the Trans Memory Archive exhibition says, “We used to wait all year for the six days of Carnival to go out and be ourselves: we came together, had fun, and dressed as we wanted. It was our superstar dream, something that you could live in Carnival or in exile.”⁷⁸ Another wrote: “6 days of freedom and 359 days in jail. It was like that before and after the dictatorship, even worse after the

dictatorship. But those days were magic because the same people that discriminated against us treated us as divas. A dancing group without a travesti was incomplete.”⁷⁹

More than understanding citizenship as a static status, this monograph approaches it as a practice from below. It pays attention to the ways in which, in specific spaces and times, socially excluded people negotiated a fragile belonging with their broader social community. By expanding our conception beyond a state status associated with legal rights, the example of Carnival helps us situate citizenship in the negotiation of the right of circulating freely and being desired in a concrete interaction.⁸⁰ Focusing on this particular practical layer to understand citizenship as a form of communal belonging places Carnival at the center of negotiating these limits with which travestis recovered their right to be with others through practices such as dressing up, dancing, and celebrating in public spaces. During Carnival, a new pact with their audience, the same people who promoted hatred against them the rest of the year, marked their presence.

The long history of travestis’ participation in Carnival is an eloquent depiction of this struggle. In a collection of articles about Carnival published in the travesti newspaper *El teje* in 2011, La Vieja Vanesa defined carnival as a “sacred date.” She said she was born during the 1930s and that her first participation in Carnival happened in Buenos Aires in 1953. She saw this experience as a turning point. That night was an opportunity to become “cinema stars and vedettes,” to be applauded by the public.⁸¹ It is not easy to imagine the emotional power that this ephemeral inclusion could provide. This was a chance for travestis to be seen as they perceived themselves, as a technology of gender affirmation and a negotiation of citizenship.

Malva—the Chilean emigre I introduce in [chapter 2](#), who sometimes defined herself as marica and other times as travesti—wrote that the innovative participation of the *putos* (faggots) in the Buenos Aires Carnival become more visible in 1962, during the dictatorship of José María Guido, who tried to give a sensation of

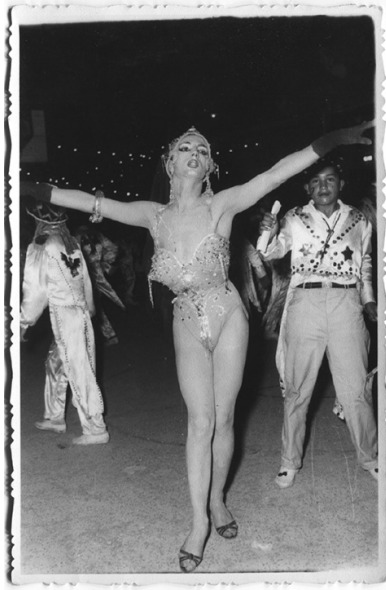
more freedom to citizens. Guido was a lawyer who led a civic-military coup against Arturo Frondizi with the support of the supreme court and the military forces. His government prepared the scene for new elections in which the Peronist and Communist parties were banned and in which, as a result, Arturo Umberto Illia was elected. Even if the policing of homosexual and travestis' presence in the street was a constant that went beyond civil and military governments, persecution intensified in the sixties. Malva stressed that in 1966 when the dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía tried to remove travestis and maricas from Carnival, the public resisted in some neighborhoods because they considered them to be an essential part of the show.⁸²

In the early 1960s, different groups of travestis became famous among the public in Buenos Aires. During these years Malva participated in the Carnival by knitting, designing costumes, and performing.⁸³ For Buenos Aires, it meant translating the private shows of transformismo, which were usually limited to working-class cabarets, to a mainstream celebration. Many of the travestis had experience in their hometown Carnivals, and they also traveled to Brazil and Uruguay.⁸⁴ Malva's Carnival ephemera, collected between 1961 and 1963, shows their role in producing popular entertainment (figures 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8). One sketch for a poster (figure 3.8) celebrates a female figure whose principal features are her skinny body and her ass, with her face obscured by her arm and feathers. The flyers included in Malva's archive distributed during their performances have a list of names that express travesti subcultural background: Cocinelli (referencing the French travesti superstar Coccinelle), the use of quotation marks, and the female article *La* as a gender marker: La Rubia Mireya (Mireya the Blonde) or La Chilena (the Chilean woman).⁸⁵ Malva's photographs and drawings are indicative of how Carnival acted as a scenario for gender embodiment. Travestis made use of their padded bras by posing to produce an image that highlighted their slender elasticized figures and the curves of their breasts, forming a feminine silhouette, while in the drawing, the shadowed image covered the genitalia and

emphasized the buttocks. The crossing of the legs could work along with *trucadoras*—a cloth used in the genital area to minimize the bulge produced by the penis, which suggested, with the leotard, the idea of female genitalia. Carnival photographs show how the use of flared dresses was an opportunity to exalt a flared figure.⁸⁶

Carnival history in the northern provinces also expresses how Carnival worked as a mechanism to destroy everyday authoritarianism. In this region the Carnival usually worked as a process for travesti families' intervention. This was clear in the history of Lohana Berkins, a prominent leader of the travesti social movement. She was born in Pocitos in northern Argentina in 1965.⁸⁷ In 1978, when she was thirteen, her father kicked her out of the house. She moved to the provincial capital, Salta, where she started doing sex work. After arresting and imprisoning her, police officers took her to the home of her first travesti mother, La Pocha. Stephen Vides has pointed out that queer history usually avoids approaching domestic spaces, because they are related to assimilation and heteronormativity. His recent history of US queer domesticities shows that the formulation of LGBTTTIQ+ emotional assemblages was central to building spaces of autonomy and agency.⁸⁸ Building travestis' families was an extended practice among the community. Families were an informal arrangement of cohabitants in a shared house with a head (a mother). The mother was responsible for organizing the housing and administering her daughters' money. Travesti families were an emotional ensemble that offered protection from an early age.⁸⁹ Families were often groups of migrants. La Pocha had also been born in a small town and had migrated to the city of Salta. She never told her travesti children her age. Similar experiences united Lohana's travesti family: migration, rejection, police violence, sex work, and finally, a mutual love of Carnival. After spending some years in Salta with La Pocha and her travesti family, Lohana moved to Buenos Aires, but she continued traveling every year to share the Carnival experience with her travesti family in Salta. This was an emotional connection to original travesti families and Carnival, that little space of freedom.⁹⁰

Salta is a staunchly Catholic and conservative province in northern Argentina (a region with a strong Indigenous and mixed-race-background population), where the Carnival tradition is widespread among the population. Travesti families prepare all year to participate in the event, sewing dresses and costumes. The celebration is an opportunity to highlight their creativity in producing their fabulous costumes. Travestis have traveled for decades with dancing groups throughout the Andes zone, showing off all their female splendor.⁹¹ Carnival had the powerful effect of giving meaning to travestis' feminine incarnation through a temporary but strong community acceptance.



Figures 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8. *Top left and right:* Malva Solís in the Carnival. *Bottom:* Draft of a Carnival dance group flyer. Trans Memory Archive. Malva Solís Collection. 1960s.

Carnival had specific rules to control gender transgressions. For example, in Salta, women were not allowed to “dress like men” after 1954, and men to “dress like women” after 1968. There were few exceptions. In 1955 the authorities briefly allowed men to “dress like women” by asking prior police permission, but the restriction was reimplemented in 1966.⁹² Some of the organizers of Carnival

criticized the regulations, because they considered that this celebration was an opportunity for the “poor to become queens and kings” and tried to convince the military government that it was a ritual with which people could leave their anger behind.⁹³ At a national level, the dictatorship of 1976–83 also punished anyone in Carnival who “changed their appearance in public without State authorization.” Moreover, the military canceled the public holiday of Carnival, because they thought that it affected the national economy by reducing productivity.⁹⁴

Even if the state authorities insisted on moralistic restrictions, the Carnival audience celebrated ambiguous gender expressions that reinforced and challenged sexual rules. A good example is La Beba Irresistible (The Irresistible Baby Girl), a famous character in Salta’s Carnival, performed by Juan Carlos Ripoll. His first presentation was in 1955 in Tartagal, a small community in northern Salta province. The crossdresser La Beba was a glamorous personality, a winner of several prizes during the Carnival celebrations. He participated in Carnivals in the northern provinces of Salta, Corrientes, and Chaco. During interviews he was always distinguished from travestis. He spotlighted his humor and elegance to “make people laugh.” He also insisted on showing that he was a father and the head of a traditional family, elements with which he negotiated the limits of his gender expression.⁹⁵

Carnival was useful for building a fragile politics of belonging that mitigated social exclusion from the public sphere. Travestis used ingenious strategies to place themselves at the Salta core of popular culture and to negotiate the limits of their social belonging. During the military dictatorship (1976–83), Berkins’s and La Pocha’s family participated in the foundation of the dancing group Los Caballeros de la Noche (Gentleman of the Night) to challenge their local legal prohibition from the celebration. By using male names, they got into the habit of participating in the celebration. Los Caballeros de la Noche had a substantial impact on the travestis in the region. The circulation of these shows in towns and cities all over the country may have led to possible self-identifications, making available the

possibility of becoming travestis. The case of Luly speaks to this impact. She was born in San José (Catamarca) in 1987, four years after the fall of the military junta. From a very young age, she challenged her parents' attempts to treat her as a boy. When she was very young, she met Los Caballeros de la Noche. When I interviewed her, she told me, "I was fascinated. It was my first encounter with a travesti." The possibility of identifying herself with other travestis who were publicly desired helped her make the decision to start a process of feminization throughout her life, publicly dressing with female clothes and participating in Carnival.⁹⁶ The activist Mary Robles, born in Salta in 1961, who was also one of the founders of Los Caballeros de la Noche, looked to challenge state restrictions. During the dictatorship, the older travestis restricted Mary from the group, because she was underaged and to avoid the police accusing them of the corruption of minors. However, Mary then decided to participate in a dancing group formed by cisgender people. She asked a cisgender friend to apply for a Carnival license and to lend her documents. Using her friend's ID card and deploying a very feminine "natural look," Mary participated in one of the most prominent Carnival dancing groups.⁹⁷

Beyond its power for negotiating social prerogatives, Carnival was a living laboratory for public body experimentation. Preparation for the celebrations created space for the development of several embodiment techniques, from dressmaking to the use of injectable oil to produce their silhouettes. These practices created an internal space for the circulation of knowledge about body making. Carnival was an occasion on which people who identified with different dissident gender expressions, such as maricas and travestis, gathered. They shared this everyday party to exchange experiences and techniques of their sexual dissidence. Travestis used makeup and spangles, even if police officers could stop them at the end of their show.

Carnival was an opportunity to use *trucaje*.⁹⁸ The paradigmatic essence of the corporeal making of travesti culture was the breasts and hips, the key corporeal components of their identity. Malva

narrated that *trucaje* was used depending on how “nature” helped them reach a more feminine body, as cotton and foam rubber elements were popular in the 1950s and 1960s to produce body curves. Moreover, some maricas who worked in theaters spread knowledge about cosmetics to make their faces feminine.⁹⁹ La Vieja Vanesa wrote about the homemade technologies before the use of hormones and silicone during the early 1960s, when travestis used an injection of oil:

There was a 2 milligram injection that produced an inflammation, and if you used it often it would eventually cause heart murmurs. [. . .] After 72 hours, your tits would start to fall, and you would have like drooping breasts. To avoid this, after 62 hours you had to put on a nipple shield, and water would come out, you would have huge nipples, you would grab the nipple shield again, cut the cup from the bra frame, put the nipple through, and let go: you couldn't move because if you moved the elastic, on top of everything else, one tit would stay straight and the other one would shift and go lower or higher, so you had to stay like that, stay still for an hour. At the end of the hour, you touched yourself, and you came out beautiful.¹⁰⁰

The photograph on the facing page (figure 3.9), from 1980, overflows with joy. Someone took it on one of Berkins's multiple visits to Salta to participate in Carnival. The picture is an excellent example of how Carnival mixed cultures. Micaela Casas is dressed as a Chola, a traditional indigenous character of the northern postcolonial Carnival. The other travestis are wearing night-party dresses, wigs, and costumes usually associated with urban white characters. Berkins's pose seems to be a parody of exulting femininity and sexiness. She has no costume, and she is taking out her breast to be captured by the camera and be immortalized. Some testimonies insist that Berkins was the first travesti in Salta to have silicone breasts. This was a revolution among the local community, a technology of intimacy that showed that travestis could also have their own permanent breasts.¹⁰¹

Beyond the Carnival figures, the photo highlights the role of racialization in travesti body-making. It is not surprising that in some of her texts, Berkins pointed out that, because of the trajectories of mobility from villages to provincial capitals or Buenos

Aires, migration was an embodied racialized experience.¹⁰² Many travestis grew up in provincial areas with a mixed-race population, in which Indigenous communities have a strong presence. Travestis' migration articulated a long history of intersection between sexuality and racialization, one reason that the emergence of their visibility in the media was also shaped by racialized imaginaries. During the twentieth century, Argentines crafted a popular racial slang that included sexual metaphors that reinforced racial distinction by defining the alleged sexual immorality of darker Argentines. For example, middle-class *porteños* (people from the capital city of Buenos Aires) racialized and thus denigrated internal migrants—especially those from northern provinces, regions that *porteños* generally associated with larger Indigenous populations. During the twentieth century, the stigmatized representation of certain characters collaborated with the racialization of a national sexuality. In the 1940s the urban elite and middle classes used the term *cabecitas negras* (little black heads, the name of a local bird) to confront working-class migrants from other provinces who were associated with Juan Domingo Perón's political movement (1945–55). This concept linked the darker skin of the inhabitants of northern provinces with the supposed lack of civilization of its Indigenous and working-class heritage, which threatened Argentina's fate as a Europeanized South American nation.



Figure 3.9. Foto Archivo y Memoria LGBTIQ Salta Argentina (Fondo G. Pardo) Salta, 1980s. *Back row, right to left:* La Catucha, Débora Flores †, Silvia Tapia †, Mary Robles, Gustavo Federico Díaz Gay Shirley Internacional, Micaela Casas “La fofa” †, La Pocha Escobar, Daysi la Mar †, Lohana Berkins †. *Front row, right to left:* Jeny Guaymás †, Cristal Rufino, NN and Marion Navarro †.

This racialization also articulated a high sexualization of travestis’ bodies. While constructing their bodies, travestis also participated in the exaltation of the emblem of the morocha argentina. That flexible symbol, which included light- and dark-skinned black-haired women, marked by an exultant eroticism whose accent was on their curved bodies, was appropriated in the travestis’ experimentation through the fantastic production of curved figures: large hips and busts. Although the travestis’ bodies did not always fit into the dominant representations of a country imagined as white, their dark and joyous figures seemed promising for a male erotic market that generally associated these components with freedom and sexual

pleasure. Their female embodiment was thus also in dialogue with a thriving sexual market. Travestis embodied the female sexual fantasy of the Argentine brunette.

As addressed in [chapters 4](#) and [5](#), travestis' breasts were a transgressive symbol of postdictatorial Argentina. In the 1980s the progressive sexualization of the public sphere, named a period of *destape* (undressing), was characterized by the emergence of a powerful media and counterculture. The postdictatorship extension of the language of human and civil rights reshaped the sexual limits of public space.¹⁰³ Travestis had a particular role in this process: showing their bodies—especially their breasts—would become a characteristic element of their mobilizations. Berkins defined this as a change over time. Before silicone, maricas had covered their bodies with glamorous dresses to conceal the body they did not have, and they filled out the dresses with padding. Travestis showed their breasts to prove how they transformed their bodies, proof of their embodied femininity. Berkins went to Salta in the early 1980s to show how she had produced her huge silicone breasts. She was the first travesti in the province to have that change and wanted to enjoy the only occasion when society allowed them to express their bodies, to show off what she had done.¹⁰⁴

The several photographs of travestis' participation in Carnival provide insights into the meaning of toplessness. As analyzed in [chapter 5](#), showing their breasts would become a central practice of public protest during the 1980s. First, it was a celebration of *realness*. Beautiful bodies were investments of capital and corporeal effort; some women needed to do sex work for many months to get the money to perform that kind of physical transformation. It was also an investment in raising the value of their bodies in the sexual market. Furthermore, the celebration and joy provided by showing their breasts compensated them for the painful homemade treatments with which some of the breasts had been produced. Second, the act of showing breasts broke the expectations of representation. Society did not expect cisgender women to show their naked breasts during their dance, but travestis pushed that

barrier and showed another face of femininity. This was a more sexualized political symbol of public liberation, even if it was for just six days out of the year. Travestis forced their inscription into the erotic figure of femininity. They claimed to be desirable and put their bodies in sexy positions. Third, this was a symbol of their embodied precariousness. As the following chapters show, by displaying their breasts, they underscored the precarious conditions that usually killed them too young.

* * *

The making of cultures has always involved bodies. Travestis shaped a diverse and changing culture that mediated embodiment. While identifications of travestis changed with the emergence of new narratives and biotechnologies, histories and images of successful embodiment acted as technologies of intimacies that made possible the idea of experiencing gender beyond the one assigned at birth.

Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Salta, and Paris are points of the multiple flows of people, photographs, newspaper articles, objects, and knowledge. Movement for economic opportunities or to afford treatments, the attempt to escape police violence, or the desire to become a superstar connected global webs with which travestis defined a more visual culture. This global connection created space for translation (for example, the adaptation of *Les Girls*), conflicts (between artistic travestis and the others), or a mixture (such as *Carnival*). This was a scenario with multiple points and latitudes where traditions participated in everyday travesti embodiment. During this transition, travestis used concepts such as authenticity as a metric to value their beauty, and actively participated in the making of the female beauty canon by re-creating, challenging, or exalting its features.

The *Carnival* celebration articulated global and local cultural practices. The small celebration of transformation had a temporary but powerful impact. The suspension of exclusion was a temporary laboratory, a crucial moment in travesti body culture analyzed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4

Living Laboratories

Travesti/Trans Knowledge and Homemade Technologies



Figure 4.1. La Ñoño after injecting herself with silicone, possibly during the 1980s. Archivo de la Memoria Trans. No date.

In the late 1980s, La Ñoño took a photograph of an important day: the moment she produced her breasts with self-injected silicone ([fig. 4.1](#)). She is wearing her *rieles* (literally “rails”): a harness similar to a bra but without cups, used to shape the injected material. She shows off the two little bottles of pharmaceutical silicone and the numerous syringes with which the *siliconera*—another travesti specializing in these procedures—had modified her body.

In postdictatorial Argentina, following the fall of the military regime in 1983, self-injection with industrial or pharmaceutical silicone transformed travestis' embodiment. In contrast with cotton or rubber, silicone provided a more defined female silhouette. The media transformed silicone into a metonym for being travesti: journalists created a spectacle out of how travestis were transforming the shapes of their bodies to create fabulous silhouettes without medical oversight. Silicone gave travestis new freedoms, such as the possibility to wear risqué dresses and show off their naked bodies. Suddenly they could be free from the stuffiness and constrictions of foam rubber and cotton suits. They replaced the prosthetic extensions of their bodies by shaping their silhouettes with biotechnological practices. But silicone also produced health risks that created deformities and infections, and sometimes even ended the lives of travestis. In a parallel development, though not popularized by the media, trans men experimented in these same years with hormones that transformed the possibilities of male embodiment and enhanced new gendered languages which with they gave sense to their male experience. Trans men explored the underground market of hormones to stimulate hair growth, change fat distribution, and lower the voice, thus affirming their manly features.

The history of the governance of sex in Argentina—by which I mean the convergence between the legal banning of gender affirmation practices explored in [chapter 2](#), the cisgenderism of science, and social exclusion—produced new self-body-fashioning practices. In order to face the dispossession of sovereignty over their bodies, trans, travesti, and transsexual people developed a unique repertoire of biotechnological and prosthetic embodiment. This was not a practice unique to Argentines. In the later decades of the twentieth century, trans people around the world began to push body limits to a new level, learn more about themselves, and circulate medical information globally and intergenerationally. Like any prohibited but desired activity, this one produced new markets and practices. This chapter analyzes some of both male and female embodiment repertoires as a reaction to the governance of sex in

Argentina. It explores the practices of travestis fighting to give shape to their bodies between Carnivals and sex work, as well as young men running from underground markets to pharmacies to get testosterone on the underground market.

Previous studies have addressed female travestis' embodiment,¹ and more recently we have seen pioneer genealogies about trans male experiences.² By connecting stories of both female and male gender-affirmation practices, and combining the analysis of documentary sources, fieldwork, informal conversations, oral history interviews, and available online testimonies, this chapter expands the history of trans technologies from the second half of the twentieth century to the present. This perspective goes against an idea of the apparent progressive modernization of these techniques; the chapter emphasizes the coexistence of biotechnological developments and the more handcrafted ones that we analyzed in previous chapters.

My approach to embodiment is doubly inspired. One source of inspiration comes from Marx's idea of "living machines," a concept that points to how capitalist relations shape workers' bodies; I expand this idea to consider how bodies are living laboratories and archives. I am thinking of bodies as living laboratories and archives because, as I explain in the introduction, nationhood and citizenship were built in Argentina in a practical experience with those corporealities that were excluded. But there was also a process of community experience-building that was articulated in the experimentation in that precarious space created by exclusion. This is how Gabriela—a travesti activist—explained it in an ethnographic study of crime in Buenos Aires published in the 1990s: "We learned about hormones from the liver[s] of our friends."³ The intergenerational production of knowledge about hormone doses through the examination of how hormones affected travestis' livers is a powerful synthesis of how the experience of archiving and experimenting on themselves was vital to the process of building these travesti and trans repertoires of body construction.

My other inspiration comes from travesti slang. *Trucaje* can be used to name a wide range of nonmedical embodiment techniques; the term has even been included in the government's official guidance for healthcare services dedicated to the trans and travesti population.⁴ It recognizes institutional and informal spaces of knowledge production and goes beyond identities to underscore sex-dissident embodiment practices. Here I give it a flexible use to point out the coexistence of diverse temporalities in which silicone, hormones, prostheses, clothing, the forging of documents, makeup, cotton, hairstyles, and more have coexisted and been given different meanings. This grouping of different practices disrupts the temporal meaning attached to handcrafted techniques and elaborated technologies as methods to define the mixing of practices and knowledge with which people have affirmed their gender over time.

This chapter is organized into three sections. First it explores the female repertoire with a focus on travestis' body-making. Second, following the trajectories of two trans men, it explores some male embodiment repertoires. Third, the chapter describes how disappointment with the biotechnological played a role in activist discourses to formulate alternative models of identification that embraced individuals' corporeality.

Travestis' Labs: Silicone and Fantasies

In the mid-1980s, *Eroticón* magazine published an interview with Deborah Singer. Deborah was a well-known travesti who worked in theaters in Buenos Aires and Montevideo (Uruguay), and also appeared on television shows and in magazines.⁵ Because her TV roles did not pay her bills, she also sold sex on the Pan-American Highway that runs through the north of the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, a road that connects the whole hemisphere and that in the 1960s became a center of sexual commerce. With Marce Joan Butierrez, I have studied how, on the Pan-American Highway, police officers regularly expelled travesti and transsexual sex workers from the city of Buenos Aires to the side of the Pan-American Highway, a space of conflict and violence in which cisgender,

travesti, and transsexual women struggled to find a place to sell sex. Life on the Pan-American was cruel; many were victims of civil and police violence. As the next chapter also shows, during the 1980s the violence against travestis in that area increased drastically: many drivers deliberately ran over travestis with their cars, a crime that usually went unpunished.⁶ Deborah was an iconic heroine among her travesti sisters. In contrast with others who had more successful careers, Deborah used her time on TV to advocate for travestis' rights. As she explained to the *Eroticón* journalist, she agreed to get naked on camera in order to underscore Argentine social hypocrisy: the same society that desired and consumed travestis' bodies condemned them to marginalization.

Deborah was twenty-eight years old at the time of the interview. After some years of training herself in the theater and "being a gay man," as she described it, at the age of twenty she turned herself into a travesti. In the magazine photographs, Deborah showed her voluptuous body and rehearsed the sensual movements with which she drove her clients crazy. She was almost 6 feet, 6 inches tall, with very sensual curves. In the Archivo de la Memoria Trans Wikitrans, a friend describes her as "more than six feet of femininity," a good person "beloved by all of us." Deborah's shows are described as spectacular, groundbreaking performances.⁷ The press photographed Deborah several times with her firm silicone breasts exposed, at the same time describing the violence with which clients and police officers attacked travestis. These full-length nude photographs of her, published in a popular magazine, were perhaps the first totally naked published expression of a female gender-nonconforming body: a female that went beyond the desire for normalized genitalia who captivated male imagination. While journalists may have been trying to humiliate her by requesting her to show her genitalia, Deborah was able to turn this condition into a position of power: she showed herself to be sexy and proud of her body. She performed her body as a desirable subject of politics; her eroticism became a political weapon. In this sense I invite readers to read these photographs not as an act of violent reproduction but as

unprecedented empowerment of travestis' bodies, a public call for them to be proud of themselves. More attracted than repelled by her, the journalist who interview Deborah interrogated her about her clients' desires and her sexual performance. While recounting the kinky pleasures of her clients, from whom she earned \$300 USD per night, Deborah announced that she did not enjoy prostitution but had no choice but to practice it. She told reporters stories of wealthy clients and married men with double lives. In addition, between poses Deborah dismantled heteronormative assumptions about trasvestis' sexuality: she defined herself as a top and enjoyed penetrating men rather than occupying the role of bottom, as expected for her female embodiment.⁸

Deborah spoke proudly in the interview of being a travesti, an identity that was constantly under attack in the press through pernicious jokes that emphasized the alleged artificiality of travestis' femininity. While journalists expected good material for their tabloid newspaper, Deborah deployed an unexpected sensuality and a political discourse that made her experience a visible possible life. The journalist asked if she would have genital surgery, but she found this question annoying: "Are you crazy? I'm a travesti. I don't want to be a transsexual. I want to have pleasure like men because even to be fucked you need to be a macho." Deborah laughed at journalists and accused them of being "boring heterosexuals who will never taste more than a vagina,"⁹ a statement that demonstrates how, in the 1980s, the distinction between travestis and transsexuals became more underscored by travestis.



Figure 4.2. *Eroticón*. Colección Grandes Temas no. 2 (1986). Peter Pank's Archive.

Deborah was a talented performer: she moved with eroticism in front of the camera. Asked about how she had transformed her body, she replied, “You have to psych yourself up. You have to start to feel like a woman, to move like them, to talk like them, to give yourself a female name [. . .] between your legs you have more than just a clitoris.”¹⁰ In another interview with a newspaper, she described the practice of waxing, how the consumption of hormones made her skin softer and her breasts grow, and how she had created her enormous

breasts and buttocks with silicone.¹¹ Deborah rejected the idea that there was a starting or end point to her transformation. Her embodiment was a living experience in which fantasy and material merged. During the 1980s process of the sexualization of Argentine culture, buttocks increased their role as a marker of female sensuality and consolidated as a public object of male desire. Don Kulick's pioneer ethnography about travestis in Salvador de Bahia analyzed the role of buttocks as a significant marker of bodily transformation and a landmark of feminine beauty within Brazilian culture.¹² PJ Pietro highlighted that in the case of Argentina, the attention to buttocks expressed the hypersexualization of travestis' racialized bodies. The attention to hips has re-created a body image related to the pornographic fantasy of racial mixing between white and Afro-Argentine blood in making a female standard with exuberant curves.¹³

While we do not usually consider media scandals to be a part of LGBTTTQI+ political history, Deborah's interview helps us understand how scandalous media participation played a role in politicizing trans embodiment and connecting it with broader ideas of freedom and democracy in postdictatorial Argentina. The moral limits of political queer history usually avoid the tabloid press as a political scenario. Yet the case of Deborah demonstrates that while her story fed the newspaper audience's morbid interest in silicone bodies, it also provides a space for her agency to produce an open challenge to policemen and civil violence. By appropriating the language of sexual comedy that emerged during the final years of the dictatorship, Deborah introduced a new language of individual rights and freedom to public discourse on travestis.¹⁴ Singer's nudity in the tabloid press was part of journalists' growing attention to travestis' embodiment practices. While during the 1950s and 1960s, the media had become obsessed with hormones and surgery, during the 1980s the popularization of silicone flooded newspaper pages. For example, the well-known magazine *Humor* published a guide: "How to Become a Travesti." With mockery the journal exploited the idea of travestis' alleged artificial female corporeality with the image of a

bald man with big breasts, shaving his face. Shaving erased male features, producing a woman by creating smooth female skin. The magazine's articles noted different products, such as clothing and makeup, all of them also used by cisgender women.¹⁵ The same year, *Humor* published another special issue in which a journalist lived for a day "dressed" as a travesti. Even though this was a stunt done for laughs, the article could not avoid showing social violence against travestis.¹⁶

The interview of Deborah Singer was in dialogue with a shifting national reality characterized by a convulsive political context, the emergence of human rights and lesbian-gay movements, and the sexualization of public discourse. The newly elected government of Raúl Alfonsín (1983–89) faced the challenges of leading a fragile democracy. Jennifer Adair points out that Alfonsín was elected on the "strength of his pledge to prosecute the armed forces for their crimes and restore a measure of material well-being to Argentine lives. Food, housing, and full employment became the litmus tests of the new democracy."¹⁷ However, the government could not face the military regime's legacy: increasing poverty, unsustainable public debt, and open military resistance to being judged for their crimes. After the first Latin American trial of those responsible for the dictatorship, in 1985, a military rebellion in 1987 forced the government to abandon the trials of those who had committed human rights violations during the prior decade. President Alfonsín determined under certain pressures that the mid- and low-ranking military personnel involved in the crimes of the dictatorship were absolved of guilt because they had carried out orders from their superiors. In 1989, after several failed economic plans, hyperinflation caused the collapse of the government, and new elections. The newly elected president, Carlos Saúl Menem, would face a new decade guided by the neoliberal principles of the free market and privatization. During two administrations, Menem profoundly transformed Argentina: he disassembled the social state, promoted deindustrialization, privatized state-owned companies, and created macroeconomic policies that tied Argentina's currency to

the US dollar. Under American influence the government became a global example of neoliberalism by reaching new economic heights and promoting financial stability. However, the collateral effects of these politics created a new crisis: in 1995 unemployment reached 18 percent, and poverty quickly increased to 50 percent of the country's population.¹⁸

Deborah Singer's protest strategies would be incomprehensible without considering the wider transformations in Argentine protest and sexual culture. During the 1980s the human rights movements, led by family members of those kidnapped and tortured during the dictatorship, became prominent social actors. The new relevance of movements such as Madres de Plaza de Mayo—the mothers of the victims of state terror during the last military regime, who started protesting during the second year of the dictatorship, in 1977, and continued after its demise in 1983, through the present—created a new scenario of conflict with the emerging democracy and established human rights as the major language of protest. Travestis' struggle also converged with a new interest in sexual freedom. After decades of censorship, the fall of the dictatorship was followed by an unprecedented sexualization of public life: intimacy and eroticism flooded magazine covers and television screens. Natalia Milanesio shows that the new sexual freedom associated with the democracy reshaped the “way Argentines talked, understood, and experienced sexuality, a change in manners, morals, and personal freedoms.”¹⁹ However, this sexual liberation was not extended to everyone. Inspired by human rights movements, groups such as the Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (Argentine Homosexual Community)—like other groups that I analyze in the next chapter—struggled to find their place in the emerging democracy by criticizing discrimination and state repression. Travestis and transsexuals were in a worse situation; even while democracy promised new rights and liberties, these groups continued to suffer the state's often violent repression. It is in this scenario, in which human rights, sexuality, and politics intersected, that people like Deborah Singer struggled

for travestis' rights to enjoy the public space conquered under democracy.

As I explain in [chapters 2](#) and [3](#), travestis and transsexuals deployed an open repertoire of female embodiment. After the public scandal of Dr. Defazio and the state regulation that banned gender affirmation treatments in 1967, travestis developed a new scenario of biotechnological interventions that would reach its peak in the 1980s with the massive application of liquid silicone. Far from being a teleological development in which homemade biomedical procedures displaced *trucaje*, the repertoire combined multiple elements for self-fashioning, from the *trucadoras* to the consumption of hormones. Geography and class mediated female embodiment. This process did not have a specific starting or a final point; instead, it articulated multiple embodiment practices. In their search for a body of their own, travestis experienced multiple corporeal transformations. A body of their own was their laboratory; they transformed their bodies into an open stage for experimentation.

Naming, Fantasy, and Clothing

Even though technologies and information circulated among travestis, every gender body-affirmation path was unique. Here I reconstruct some stories to show how the experience of embodiment is inseparable from the intersections of race, class, age, gender, and place. I rely mostly on oral history interviews and online testimonies to expand the newspaper chronicles usually shaped by prejudice and a perspective limited to Buenos Aires.

Mary was born into a poor family in Salta—a northern city with an important travesti community and tradition of Carnival, as shown in the previous chapter—in 1961. Her mother was a domestic worker, and the family eventually moved with Mary's aunt and some cousins to a rural area, where they shared one room. Every day after school, Mary worked shining shoes to help her mother pay the bills. During those days Mary started experimenting with her body: she wore unisex clothes and began to pluck her eyebrows. She spent hours in front of the mirror with a towel covering her head as if it were long

hair, looking at the little details with which one day she would achieve the body she dreamed of. Mirrors were an essential travesti gender technology; they often appear in photographs among the Trans Memory Archive's collection. Several memoirs stress the hours travestis spent experimenting with their bodies and archiving female knowledge. The scholar Marlene Wayar wrote that her first memory of her breasts was when she was playing in front of the mirror, pushing her breasts together, even before she had injected any silicone or hormones, modulating her body's femininity.²⁰ Fantasy does not refer to an artificial mechanism. Instead, it stresses the game of playing with garments and body parts as a vehicle for imagining possible futures and developing knowledge that clothing itself is not enough, that there are certain gestures that enable a body to be read as feminine or masculine while wearing a skirt or tight trousers.

But sociability was even more important for self-actualization. On one of her long walks to the city, Mary met her first marica friend—who later would identify as travesti—Evelyn. When Evelyn asked what her name was, Mary said her name was Claudia. But her new friend laughed, because Claudia didn't sound like the name of a female superstar, and renamed her Mary. A name was the first gender technology used to make sense of the female experience, that way of inhabiting the world with which Mary would forever leave Claudia behind.²¹ Mary embraced her new name as a treasure. She understood that it was the first thing to defend from a society that did not recognize her gender. Mary's friends usually chose their names from female film stars; for example, Evelyn was inspired by Marilyn Monroe. Mary even defended her name in the face of the police every time she was arrested and imprisoned. Years later she discovered that her police records were under "Mary," even though the name had not yet been legally recognized.

Travestis embodied social exclusion, and by doing so they experienced degrees of autonomy and abuse from a young age. When Mary was thirteen, a "very white" teacher started bullying her for her female gender expressions, making her school life hell. Her teacher's

discrimination combined racism and classism with her rejection of Mary's female body expression. In 1964 Mary abandoned her home in order to "become a woman." She started working as a maid in the houses of wealthy families to afford food and have a place to sleep. She experimented with clothing. She wore certain garments, such as skirts, baggy shirts, and loose trousers, to blur her gender. She let her hair grow. These were difficult times, the years prior to, during, and after the dictatorship, and navigating the boundaries of gender in this way often landed travestis in prison. In the 1990s, Mary became an activist for trans rights. As she describes in her autobiography, after decades of what she defines as a dark time in which travestis and trans women couldn't even "dream of having rights," she was part of that generation that—as I describe in [chapter 5](#)—challenged extreme social marginalization. Like many travestis in the 1990s, Mary went from one place to another trying to make a better life, from Salta to Rome and Paris. She was in the seacoast city of Mar del Plata when she joined the group Transparencias, which advocated against police harassment toward the local trans community. Years later, she returned to Salta to create a local branch, and some years later acted as the province coordinator of the Association of Travestis, Transsexuals, and Transgender People from Argentina.

For travestis, clothing was the first space for autonomous experimentation with their bodies. Some learned to wear makeup from their mothers or friends, another key component in feminizing their faces. In the late 1980s in Salto, an agro-industrial city in Buenos Aires province, Marcela wore a long shirt with flower prints that looked like a dress. In high school a teacher read her body as female and told her that women were allowed to wear only skirts. Marcela already wore her hair long, and for many people at the school she was just another woman. She was only sixteen when she "wore a short skirt. It was the first time I felt the freedom to be who I was."²² A decade later, in a northeastern province of Argentina, the teenager Elyzabeth had a unique opportunity: she was in charge of her school's musical costumes. Her school was a private, middle-class, and conservative institution. Elyzabeth tried on a dress for the

first time, and, for her, this turned out to be a one-way street. She then began a long journey that included buying women's underwear, makeup, and a pair of heels that she hid behind a light meter outside her house, so that when she went out at night, she could transform herself.²³

Travestis formulated interpretations of diverse female beauty models. As I explain in [chapter 3](#), some copied theater, television, or film celebrities. Others just looked at women they saw in the street, at their family members, at the bodies of other travestis or cisgender sex workers. Likewise, from the 1990s onward, they also shaped public ideas of femininity with their participation on TV. María Belén Correa was born in 1973 in Lujan into a family of railway workers. In 1989 she moved to Buenos Aires, where she met her first travesti friends, Brigitte and Claudia Pia, with whom she would form the first travesti organization in Argentina in 1993: the Asociación de Travestis Argentinas (Argentine Travestis' Association [ATA]). María Belén grew up copying the women in her neighborhood, whom she described in an interview as “country women,” with pleated skirts, gauze ruffles, and clogs. Her style of dress changed when she came into contact with her new friends, and she felt out of place in her rural garb in contrast to their fabulous cosmopolitan appearance, which embodied a femininity that she had never seen before.²⁴

Whitening also played a role in shaping the complex canons of Argentine beauty. As Ana Gabriela Alvarez analyzes, nose modification has been a central practice of racialized body transformations in Argentina. Her study describes how some travestis employed practices such as nose surgery, while others used the inner ink tube of a pen or put tweezers inside their noses to lift them up or used superglue to tighten up their noses.²⁵ In the collections of the Trans Memory Archive, there is an abundance of photographs of trans women with dyed-blond hair, a mainstream practice among cisgender women in Argentina. Like the great TV stars or the political icon Evita—President Juan Domingo Perón's First Lady, from 1946 to 1952—and like many Argentine women in the 1980s and 1990s, travestis embodied a model of beauty that

highly valued what people usually define as the “Caucasian phenotype.” Speaking to me about a friend who traveled to Chile for gender-affirmation surgery, one of my informants said that she had “a beautiful white complexion, white divine.” Another informant defined herself in an interview by saying, “Before being a travesti trans person, I am a white person. I am the whitest because I am of German, Spanish, and Italian descent. People who are white like that get pink lips. They look like they are painted with lipstick.” Because of her European heritage, she could easily get pink lips. Beyond the travestis’ world, the language of beauty in Argentina has been historically mediated by notions of whiteness and Europeaness. However, it would be inaccurate to reduce travestis’ beauty to a uniform white model. As Eduardo Elena and Paulina Alberto have pointed out, whiteness has an expansive meaning in Argentina. The authors affirm that whiteness could be a cultural meaning of social inclusion promoted by the Argentine elites’ fiction of building a raceless society that, at the same time, articulated strong degrees of social hierarchization.²⁶ Travestis were usually related to the exuberant sexuality of the *morocha Argentina*, as I explain in [chapter 3](#); they embraced the voluptuousness and sensuality associated with brunette women. This figure condensed the flexible meaning of Argentine whiteness by marking people with diverse phenotypes and ethnicities as non-Black bodies. The eroticization of racially mixed heritage characterized the model; the figure of the *morocha* was productive for travestis who came from different regions and did not always match the expected whitened beauty standards.²⁷ Because usually associated with racialized working-class backgrounds, the *morocha Argentina* symbolized for travestis the eroticism of the popular classes and fabulous female figures by tracing colonial racialized beauty standards, such as the *mulatona*, who was defined by big hips, breasts, and buttocks.²⁸

Making bodies demanded an effort that went beyond clothing and makeup. As described in [chapter 2](#), from the 1940s onward, travestis shaped their bodies with the aid of cotton. From the 1960s on, with the help of spandex and foam rubber, they made garments they

called *piu-piu* or mattresses: suits that allowed them to shape their legs, buttocks, and breasts. Although this item was stuffy and uncomfortable, it helped enhance their femininity. It was an element that gave them little freedom of movement. The mattress was a mechanism that coexisted with other *trucajes* that are still used, such as the *trucadora*.²⁹ In an online interview, María Belén describes how she made her first pair of breasts with a pile of shoulder pads piled on top of each other. They were small and comfortable.³⁰ Even when silicone became the mainstream method, the prosthetic *trucajes* produced in the early twentieth century persisted at the core of travesti culture.

The Hormone and Silicone Revolution

In the 1960s and 1980s, respectively, hormones and silicone created a biotechnological revolution among travestis.³¹ These two chemical forms produced new bodily practices that freed them from stifling rubber and transformed how other people perceived their bodies socially. Silicone transformed the notion of travestismo itself and redefined community boundaries. The travesti scholar Marlene Wayar wrote that for the youngest of the 1980s generation, travestis were those who were “already made”—an idea also developed in one of the most recent catalogues of the Trans Memory Archive by María Belén Correa. Silicone and hormone added thickness to the process of affirmation, giving it a temporality: bodies to be achieved.³² Even if travesti and queer theories have a long genealogy of conflict, mostly summarized in the disputes between ideas developed in very different realities—one in academia, another in the streets, one in the United States, and another in Latin America—queer perspectives on temporalities are helpful for addressing the silicone revolution.³³ Jack Halberstam has shown how heterosexuality is organized in a hegemonic temporality related to human reproduction, maintained in certain rites of passage. He points out that notions of respectability rooted in white middle-class logic normalize people’s life schedules and define what they should expect for every stage. The hegemonic dimension of white middle-class heterosexual time

regulates people's expectations of when to have children but also shapes their everyday lives, prioritizing activities during daylight rather than at night, among other things. He and other authors mark how queer temporalities define the multiplication of alternative temporalities, such as diverse expectations of life-age stages.³⁴ However, we still know little about the normative dimension of queer time, about the codes open to interventions that regulate social belonging during a specific time period. In this sense silicone played a key role in adding a temporal density to travesti belonging, building a path of affirmation and creating boundaries among them.

Travestis were usually aware of the vital nature of the body's interactions with silicone. Repeated descriptions of silicone as an agent that "migrates" through the body and blood show how aware travestis are of the power of this material substance. Silicone was not a passive material for shaping the body; it was an active agent that could transform bodies and create dangerous side effects. Silicone injections were an embodied living experience of constant negotiation for redefining the body's limits, in which travestis tried to negotiate with the power of this unpredictable material.

In 1824 the Swiss chemist Jöns Jacob Berzelius first isolated silicium from sand. During the following decades, different scientists worked to be able to manipulate the material. In 1863 the Americans Charles Friedel and James Crafts became the first to create something like what we today know as silicone. In the early twentieth century, the British scientist Frederic Stanley Kipping combined silicium (silicio) with organic materials to produce silicone, which initially was used as a serum and wax resistant to water and that he expected would be useful during war. The industrial production of silicone expanded during the 1930s. Before silicone entered general use for medical implants, many cisgender women tried alternative mechanisms to increase the size of their breasts. After experimenting with their bodies by injecting themselves with goat's milk and paraffin, Japanese sex workers started self-injecting with silicone; they were trying to embody what they understood as the Western model of female beauty, as they offered sexual services to American

soldiers.³⁵ This also happened in the Western hemisphere; Perry and Frame point out that before “the introduction of silicone implants by Cronin and Gerow in 1962, women sought breast augmentation through a variety of methods, including injections of glycerine, autologous fat, ox cartilage, silicone oil and even snake venom, all of which carried high risk and morbidity.”³⁶ In 1962 the Americans Thomas Cronin and Frank Gerow developed the first silicone breast implants and tested them on women. The use of breast implants in the US led to multiple conflicts in defining how safe they were. In 1982 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) placed breast implants in the more rigorous Class III category because of “reports of adverse events in the medical literature.” In 1992 the FDA called for a voluntary moratorium on the use of silicone-gel breast implants until safety had been reviewed. Since 1992 several European countries and the FDA restricted the use of silicone implants, limits that would be lifted after 2006.³⁷ This past shows the artificiality of the cis/trans distinction as metonyms of natural vs. artificial bodies. Instead it points out how cisgender people also have a history of experimenting with their bodies as living laboratories and archiving these experiences.

As noted in previous chapters, prohibitions produce markets and deviations in the expected uses of goods. Since the popularization of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s, travestis pushed the limits of hormones and expanded what had previously been a restricted scope.³⁸ Others also accessed Soluna—an injectable contraceptive hormone, and/or Perlutal—a tablet or injectable synthetic form of progesterone. Travestis defined the process of taking high hormonal doses to shape their female features as *cocinarse en hormonas* (to bake oneself in hormones). Medical field studies of the 1980s found that travestis and transsexuals visited hospitals to seek hormone treatments that they had already started on their own because doctors had refused to offer them under medical supervision.³⁹ Mary recalls that the type of drug varied depending on how much money one had; sometimes a person got an injection, and sometimes they got contraceptive pills.⁴⁰ The doses depended on the amount of

money they had, personal experimentation with the drug, and the information provided by friends. The effects were different depending on the dose and how often one got it. Even if slow, the hormonal process could help to make the skin softer and to increase the size of the breasts. Nonetheless, the hormones could lead to multiple side effects. Many remember feeling genital pain, physical discomfort, sudden mood swings, or depression.⁴¹ Despite the emotional instability and body pain, the body did not always change as quickly as they expected. In a period of between three and six months, according to medical guidance, the standard hormonal treatment produces the following: redistribution of body fat, a decrease in muscle mass, softening of the skin, a decrease in spontaneous erections, breast growth, and a decrease in testicular volume. After six months, loss and slower growth of body and facial hair also occur.⁴² A survey conducted in 2018 showcased that even after the legal provision of hormones in the public healthcare system, only 19.8 percent of the female trans and travesti population undergo hormonal treatment under medical supervision.⁴³

While hormonal body transformation provided relief, it also created conflicts. This can be seen in the online testimony of Carolina, who was born in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires. When she was fourteen, her father took her to the doctor to treat what he considered an anomaly: Carolina's female features and behaviors. After the doctor told him that there was nothing medical to cure, her father kicked her out of the family home. Carolina subsequently migrated to Río Negro in Patagonia in the south of Argentina to work with her uncle on a fruit farm. When she was seventeen, she started consuming hormones that transformed her body. Even though she wore baggy shirts to hide her growing breasts, it was impossible. Her supervisor noticed the changes and fired her. Carolina then moved from one job to another, but her body transformation made working difficult. Finally, she moved to the city of Neuquén with another trans woman to sell sex.⁴⁴

Silicone also transformed travestis' culture of embodiment. Mary remembers that silicone came to Salta along with democracy. In

addition to marking a moment in history, this association suggests that the arrival of silicone brought with it expectations of freedom and new possibilities of moving or shaping their bodies. The impact of silicone was perhaps most visible in the sex industry. The material transformed the sexual market, helped travestis to displace ciswomen from city streets and avenues, and transformed travestis into the main object of desire for clients.⁴⁵ Moreover, silicone expanded the possibilities of body-making to a new level. In contrast with the *piu-piu*, silicone allowed travestis to show their skin and to wear dresses with plunging necklines. Silicone produced rounded silhouettes much faster and more effectively than hormones.

Silicone was a revolutionary and dangerous technology that was placed at the core of travestis' body culture. A recent survey shows that more than 60 percent of the female trans and travestis consulted injected themselves with silicone with the help of other trans women.⁴⁶

As I pointed out with Butierrez, even if some travestis could afford breast implants with the money they earned by selling sex, travestis faced more than an economic barrier. While few were able to afford prostheses, the majority injected silicone. In media interviews of the 1990s, travestis stressed that while "a silicone implant was between 3,000 and 5,000 dollars, silicone liquid injections are just 400."⁴⁷ The famous underground artist Batato Barea stated in the tabloid, "I had silicone injections for 2,000 dollars. I spent a week in bed with a fever and very swollen. Thank goodness that after that the size normalized, otherwise my breasts would have been too big for me."⁴⁸

Implants were usually restricted to cisgender women. Surgeons did not want to provide public treatments to travestis because they were scared of losing cisgender clients who did not want to share doctors with them, especially after the start of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Likewise, surgeons feared the possible legal effect of collaborating with practices that could be read as "sex change treatments."⁴⁹ For this reason, they mostly offered travestis treatments such as facial feminization.⁵⁰

The doctors' association of travestis with HIV/AIDS was in dialogue with the broader symbolic and material effects of the epidemic in the country. The first diagnoses of HIV in 1983 resulted in a public backlash that spread fears about gay men and travestis' moral behavior. Journalists defined people living with HIV/AIDS as members of the "club of the four Hs: Homosexuals, Hemophiliacs, Heroin Users, and Haitians," an expression also popular in the United States.⁵¹ The Argentine media used phrases such as "soft boys' pneumonia," "gay cancer," and "the pink plague" to describe an infection imagined as, in the words of one contemporary journalist, "a UFO invasion that has awakened a sexual racism against all logic."⁵²

The Argentine populace associated the geography of the virus with a Latin America of color from which Argentina historically had tried to differentiate itself. Journalists described the alleged route of the pandemic: from Africa to Haiti, then to the United States, Brazil, Uruguay, and finally Argentina. The syndrome narrative, representing a foreign disruption that gay men and travestis imported into Argentina, drew upon the historical-cultural roots of Argentine nationalism, which usually highlighted whiteness as a national value. At the end of the century, the neoliberal project promoted by the dictatorship (1976-83) and later by President Carlos Menem (1989-99) linked national whitening with a right to the consumption of first-world products for a small group based on the broader social exclusion created by deindustrialization. Menem advocated the global representation of Argentina as a white nation in relation to its neighbors, as he stated in the 1990s while visiting Howard University: "There are no blacks in Argentina, that is a Brazilian problem."⁵³ Furthermore, as had happened during the mid-twentieth century, when elites and the middle classes used *cabecitas negras* to reject those whom they imagined as enemies of modernization, the expression *negro de mierda* (shitty Black person) became a popular insult in the 1990s to describe the inhabitants of the growing city shantytowns, a metaphor that did not necessarily match people's skin color. In this context, representations of

HIV/AIDS activated anxieties of a menace to Argentina's destiny as a first-world country by associating the infection with the underdevelopment of racialized countries, such as Haiti. In the case of travestis, these representations highlighted their racialization as people from lower-income backgrounds.⁵⁴ Also, while in Argentina the virus spread swiftly among people who injected drugs, it also had a strong effect on the travesti community. For those working in sexual commerce, the chances of getting infected increased, which led many of them to die. This impact led many travesti and trans activists to work in the growing movement demanding a public response to the AIDS crisis. Access to antiretrovirals from the late 1990s onward reduced mortality rates considerably.

The state's banning of gender-affirmation practices in 1967 created new commercial circuits for silicone and other, similar products. As I described with Butierrez, during the 1980s *siliconeras* and *doctoras* became famous characters in the tabloid press and were usually imprisoned, accused of killing their patients. Consequently, travesti siliconeras and doctoras demanded a pact of silence: their patients had to promise that they would never give their names to the police in the case of a deformity or an infection. Police accused siliconeras of poisoning their patients' silicone implants, which led to their deaths.⁵⁵ But fatalities after surgery could be the result of side effects of an internal infection that was not treated.⁵⁶ The media used this scenario to criminalize travestis. What journalists defined as "the plague of silicone" created a narrative that portrayed travestis as dangerous subjects.⁵⁷ However, the circulation of information made some travestis aware of the risks of the silicone market.

The knowledge and technique of silicone injection circulated globally. Travestis siliconeras learned this technique in Salvador de Bahía (Brazil) with the equivalent there, the Bombadeiras.⁵⁸ This practice also circulated through both urban and nonmetropolitan areas. Siliconeras treated their fellow travestis in homes and hotels, traveling from one town to another, changing the locals' bodies. Siliconeras learned from every painful mistake and death. Expertise quickly spread among them, carried by those traveling between

Buenos Aires, Brazil, Europe, and their hometowns. They constructed a moving network with which they built an alternative knowledge of body construction.⁵⁹

What some travestis call *inflarse* (pumping yourself up) was (and still is) painful. Siliconeras worked with both industrial and medicinal silicone. The use of silicone was also the product of intergenerational body experimentation. Some travestis tried cheaper materials with similar consistencies, such as petroleum jelly, vegetable oils, and Bardahl plane oils, which some discontinued after suffering chest infections.⁶⁰ Industrial silicone was also dangerous. It was not processed and had coal waste remnants but was cheaper than pharmaceutical grade and came in five-liter drums. When using the pharmaceutical version, siliconeras used three different densities depending on the area of application. The more gelatinous one was applied to the buttocks and breasts to form firm but comfortable lumps, while they used the denser type of silicone for facial details such as cheeks, nose tips, and chins.

As I described with Butierrez, the silicone injection started with the attachment of bras without cups called “rails,” which could be used to shape the breasts. The rails shaped the breast contours by containing the silicone while it was injected; they had to be tight enough to contain the silicone that was injected under the skin. Continued use of the rails over several weeks was not without its risks. Skin lacerations, discomfort, pain, and circulatory problems were not uncommon, but not using them could result in the migration of the silicone, causing deformities. For the buttocks, tight can-can stockings were used for a similar purpose.⁶¹

The siliconeras injected the silicone without anesthesia. While using multiple syringes, they pierced the skin in the area of the nipples to introduce the material. They also used to place a battery between the breasts to mark a small gap. In order for the silicone to be distributed evenly, siliconeras had to inject it slowly to form the shape created by the rails. The treatment was painful, but many trans women were willing to pay this price for their desired body, even if the treatment ran the risk of causing hemorrhages or tearing

tissue.⁶² In contrast to the *piu-piu*, silicone offered more freedom. Travestis experienced for the first time wearing dresses with plunging necklines and were able to show themselves topless.⁶³

Postsurgical recovery required immobility. Travestis needed a place to rest for two weeks to a month until the silicone settled. They needed help with eating and going to the bathroom. Any movement was a risk that could create a migration of the material, potentially producing deformity or death. However, those who depended on sex work to earn a living could not always wait—the need to get out to work often ended in deformities.⁶⁴

Silicone injections combined violence and care. In Ana Laura Carrozzo's edition of trans testimonies, she includes the experience of Gabriela, who decided that she was going to be injected with silicone at a young age. The procedure was traumatic. She lay on a table in her home. Three of her best friends held her during the painful treatment. The siliconera was drinking beer while injecting the material into Gabriela's body. A few days later, Gabriela's skin turned black, and the pain became unbearable. She went to the doctor. The silicone was not deep enough but was too dense to come out through the skin. A surgeon extracted the material from her body before it killed her.⁶⁵ Living in a body with industrial silicone is a difficult experience. The silicone transforms from malleable to hard as a rock. The encapsulated breasts never adapt to the body's temperature; many travestis feel as if their breasts are an ice block over their lungs. They were also fragile: violence from clients and police could break them and cause several medical problems.⁶⁶ In a chronicle about silicone injections, activist Diana Sacayán—who was murdered in 2015, as I discuss in the epilogue—describes the experience of Vanesa, la fea (the ugly one). After the silicone injection, Vanesa fell asleep and could not stay seated in the chair. The silicone migrated to her neck and lungs. When she got to the hospital, it was too late; the silicone had solidified, and it was impossible to take it out of the body. Beyond the deformity caused by the procedure, Vanesa suffered terrible pain and, some years later,

died. Silicone could also migrate to the ankles, causing “elephant feet” and forcing travestis to wear custom-made shoes for life.⁶⁷

State prohibition and the medical pathologization of trans bodies put their lives at risk. Thinking about sex governance through a trans lens thus shows how state sovereignty over trans bodies produced precarious conditions of embodiment. Silicone injection could create other permanent side effects. Nonetheless, for many of them the pain and risk could not be compared with the pleasure of wearing dresses or looking naked into the mirror.⁶⁸ Travestis deployed multiple mechanisms to mark their bodies, define hierarchies between them, or even challenge them. Some jokes were part of the travestis’ body politics. For example, the word *conchita* (little pussy) is used to describe ciswomen and also to mock those trying to distinguish themselves from their fellow travestis after performing gender-affirmation procedures.

As Kulick has shown for the Brazilian case, in Argentina silicone thus became a community boundary: along with the experience of police detention, having silicone injection was a decisive marker of being considered a travesti and not just gay.⁶⁹ The multiple stories of migration show how these distinctions worked in different scenarios. Luly was born in 1987 in a small village in Catamarca. Her father was a truck driver, and her mother worked at home. Luly started using clothes to affirm her gender when she was sixteen. While resistant at the beginning, her parents supported her: her mother got her makeup and bought her some clothes. Luly let her hair and nails grow. Even though she was living in a sexist community, Luly achieved some degree of integration: she participated in the local Carnivals as a female dancer. While dancing at the festivals, she met a tourist who invited her to go with him to Buenos Aires. Luly felt this was her opportunity to start a new life. However, city life was not what she had expected. In the middle of the economic crisis of the late 1990s and in a discriminatory context for travestis, Luly was not able to find a job. While looking for work, she met another girl who told her not to waste her time, the only jobs for them were selling sex in the Palermo Woods. Her friend took her there so that Luly would

avoid any conflicts with the other sex workers; there were previous territorial pacts that needed to be respected in order to survive. The first time she went to the woods, she cried; she had never offered sexual services. Luly soon discovered that without silicone or surgery, she could not get as many clients as the other travestis. She moved to a hotel occupied by travestis. There Luly decided that she needed silicone so that she could make more money than the other women. One of the other travestis injected 500 cc of silicone in each of her buttocks, which she still regrets. For seven days, Luly was unable to get out of bed to eat or go to the toilet. The pains of the treatment “came after nine years”; as many others told me, living with silicone in the body could become painful. Working the street allowed her to make a considerable amount of money, which she used to pay rent for herself and for medical prostheses for her breasts.⁷⁰

Even after prostheses became more socially (but not necessarily economically) accessible for the trans community, silicone injections continued. Milena told me that she was eighteen years old in 2005, when she traveled from her hometown to Mendoza to have her breasts constructed. She was living with her boyfriend at the time, and he drove her to Mendoza and took care of her after the surgery. They bought the elastics, silicone, and syringe. The siliconera “put half a bottle in a glass jar that I cleaned with alcohol and filled ten 10mm syringes. She put them in one by one. I had the elastic on. And all the material went in.” Milena’s healing process was similar to that of the other travestis. The first week she slept sitting up, and she could not take the rails off for a month.⁷¹

Medical gender-affirmation practices were usually restricted to facial surgeries. However, because of the price of these procedures, some travestis used less-durable interventions, such as bent tweezers to produce temporary nose lifts. Moreover, for those transsexuals or the few travestis looking for genital surgery, the situation was challenging. Like Deborah Singer, most travestis did not want to undergo genital surgery (a recent study shows that only 2.4 percent of the trans women consulted accessed a genital gender-affirmation

surgery).⁷² But as I explain elsewhere, we may also consider that this was a flexible identification and some of them changed their minds over time. In 1988 the magazine *Fin de siglo* published a statistic: among 180 travestis selling sex on the Pan-American Highway, only two had had a vaginoplasty (it is possible that in this case, the journalist was using the terms *travesti* and *transsexual* interchangeably).⁷³ Of course, this data may be skewed; it is possible that transsexuals were not selling sex in that place and had other work opportunities. This evidence shows that transsexuals were not as numerous as travestis in the area. Moreover, the press was usually more obsessed with the topic than were travestis, who usually did not seek genital surgery. In 1992 a journalist wrote with surprise: “They take hormones and inject themselves with silicone, but they don’t want to have anything to do with genital surgery.”⁷⁴ In an interview for a study about crime in Buenos Aires, Gaby—a travesti activist—explained, “We travestis reject our male features but not our genitalia. It is like having two sexes at the same time.”⁷⁵ Interpretations on this point vary. Mary recalls that in the 1970s, many Salteñas (travestis from Salta) dreamed of surgery that would make them “complete women.” But most were too poor to afford such surgery, and this reconciliation to unaffordability was eventually embraced as part of travesti identity.⁷⁶ However, there is no single explanation for the multiple and diverse horizons of desire that overflow social expectations and prejudice about travestis’ bodies. Recent medical studies on the Durand Hospital Transgender program show that even after the legalization of medical assistance, only half of the patients at the hospital requesting information sought advice about neo-vaginas.⁷⁷

On the other hand, as I explain in [chapter 2](#) and develop further in [chapter 5](#), those who identified themselves as transsexuals said that they believed they were living in the wrong body and sought strategies to have genital surgery. Even if the distinction between travestis and transsexuals became clearer in the 1980s, people might have shifted their self-identification throughout their lifetimes. Many opted to travel to the United States or Chile, where such treatments

were legal. In 1978 journalists expressed shock at the story of Marissa, a transsexual from Rosario who underwent surgery in the United States. Back in Argentina she fell into a deep depression: a judge had denied her petition to be legally recognized as a woman. The process of returning home with male documents forced her to dress as a man in order to cross the border. Some neighbors supported her in the media and accused the police of harassing her every time she left her house. After being raped by some police officers, Marissa chose to remain locked up in her parents' house.⁷⁸

The press also published stories about sex-change treatments. Ana Lopez was the first woman to go undergo legal surgery in Spain. Ana had been born in Gualmayen, Mendoza, in western Argentina. She left home when she was thirteen years old to move to Buenos Aires. Between the 1970s and 1980s, Ana went into variety show theaters as a transformista and, as a travesti, worked with superstars and traveled throughout South America. Tired of police detentions, she moved first to Brazil and then to Portugal. Her first surgery was in Bolivia, but after a long legal process and psychological assistance required by the state, she had a vaginoplasty in Spain and secured legal recognition as a woman.⁷⁹

The surgeries performed in Latin America were not perfect. Surgeons at the Durand Hospital in Buenos Aires faced multiple challenges when following up with those who had genital surgery abroad. Even when the surgeries were performed by professionals, lack of experience and poor conditions of the healthcare services abroad led to problematic side effects. Adrian—director of the Group for Trans People Healthcare at Durand Hospital—remembers that during the 2000s surgeons encountered several problems with genital surgeries performed in other Latin American countries, which the surgeons needed to repair to protect patients from regular infections.⁸⁰

Trans Male Repertoires: Hormones, Activism, and the Internet

Almost invisible to the media, trans men during the second half of the twentieth century developed a wide and diverse repertoire of gender embodiment. While the erasure of their experience from the public debate sometimes gave them more autonomy from social control, it also restricted the emergence of a common language for making sense of their gender transitions. Some trans men navigated their gender nonconformity by appropriating medical language. The development of different information platforms, from magazines to websites, from medical to activist languages, shaped new meanings that organized trans men's experiences of gender affirmation.⁸¹

I combined interviews, fieldwork, informal conversations, and archival research to rebuild some of the multiple experiences of trans men during the second half of the twentieth century. These life experiences express different paths of male embodiment repertoires in the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. These men grew up at the peak of political violence, and they became adults during the democratic and neoliberal transitions. Some of them reached the peak of their adulthood in the twenty-first century when the LGBTTTIQ+ movements in Argentina expanded their rights drastically with the passing of equal marriage and the gender identity law. They struggled to make bodies of their own in a context shaped by the emerging discourses of transsexuality, the sexualization of national media, and the consolidation of the human rights and LGBTTTIQ+ movements.

Eugenio Talbot Wright (1973–2022) was born in 1973 in Córdoba, an industrial city well known for the student and working-class riots that in 1969 challenged Juan Carlos Onganía's dictatorship.⁸² Eugenio grew up in a critical and politicized environment: his parents were members of the Montoneros, a revolutionary armed group identified with Peronism. Eugenio's father was a physician who participated in the secret counterintelligence system organized by the journalist Rodolfo Walsh, both of whom were kidnapped and disappeared during the dictatorship of 1976–83.⁸³ Like many families connected to leftist organizations, Eugenio's family suffered the vicissitudes of unprecedented political violence. Between 1976

and 1983, the military regime committed countless human rights violations following the National Security Doctrine. The dictatorship promoted a radical transformation of the country that combined deep economic reforms, such as eliminating industrial protectionism, with a solid political control that banned trade unionism and political organizations. Concentration camps—so-called clandestine centers of imprisonment—multiplied throughout the country. In these camps prisoners were tortured and eliminated without leaving any traces. In this context of horror, the family members of those illegally imprisoned started different movements of public protest that would contribute to delegitimizing the dictatorship—in the country and abroad—but also created a powerful narrative of human rights that would dominate Argentine politics during the 1980s.⁸⁴

As a reaction to the family loss, Eugenio's grandmother participated in the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, a group that fought to delegitimize the military regime and that put him into contact from a young age with human rights discourse.⁸⁵ The convergence of leftist culture, sexual freedom, and human rights discourses shaped Eugenio's understanding of himself and his desire to live freely. In this radicalized context, he socially and medically transitioned as a teenager in the 1980s.⁸⁶

During the mid-1980s, trans masculinities experienced a hormonal revolution. It is possible that some trans men noticed their existence some decades before; at least since the 1970s Argentine newspapers had published articles about the powerful effects of hormones directed to cisgender men who wanted to reinforce their male embodiment. Testimonies and the few documentary sources I found show that some trans men were able to access hormones with medical assistance, while others depended on illegal markets. In 1975, the far-right magazine *El Caudillo* noted the experience of people transgressing the frontiers of gender. In an article in which it called on people to "annihilate homosexuals," it referred to the broad spectrum of dyke lesbians and potentially trans men as "women with hair on their chests, drinkers of masculine hormones with gruff

voices.”⁸⁷ As I described in [chapter 2](#), after the Defazio scandal, the media covered stories of trans men in the media. For example, Xavier, a twenty-year-old trans man, accessed gender-affirmation treatments, such as hormones and a surgical procedure, in the United States and, even if not successful, requested the legal recognition of his gender in Argentina and the right to marry his girlfriend.⁸⁸

In 1984, when he was eleven years old, Eugenio searched for information about hormones to affirm his masculinity. He discovered Sustanon 250, an injectable testosterone variant popularized in the 1970s. Eugenio managed to get some from a pharmacy and secretly self-administered injections when he could. Although unevenly applied, the hormones quickly transformed Eugenio’s body: one day when he got out of the shower, his mother noticed how hairy he was. Eugenio told her about the injections, and the family decided to support his gender-affirmation transition.⁸⁹

Eugenio’s uncle—who was a pediatrician—educated himself in hormonal treatments and helped Eugenio start a guided hormonization process.⁹⁰ This was a period of exponential expansion of medical terms, such as “Benjamin Syndrome,” which defined the experience of being trapped in the “wrong body.” This concept was crafted and globalized through Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore under John Money, a specialist in transgender therapy in the United States credited with the first medical use of gender categorization. Together with Harry Benjamin, Money had developed the medical terminology of gender that differentiated it from the traditional terminology about sex. Money used concepts such as gender role to define “all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman,” and gender to refer to “outlook, demeanor, and orientation.”⁹¹ Benjamin and Money’s teams promoted hormonal and surgical treatments to adapt the treatments to medical standards. During the 1970s Money and Benjamin shaped the “liberal turn” in transgender-affirmation treatments in the USA, making them available to a broader public.⁹² During the 1980s, the

codification of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association* (DSM) constituted a turning point that made their theory mainstream.⁹³ In this context of changing notions of transness, the teenage Eugenio started hormonal treatment under medical supervision. When he was sixteen, Eugenio went to Chile for surgery that they believed would erase all traces of his female body. After some decades, Eugenio reflected on this hypermedicalization as extreme and invasive, which involved removing his internal reproductive organs (something maybe desirable for other trans men but that for Eugenio felt traumatic).⁹⁴ As an activist in his adulthood, Eugenio advocated against the idea of being “trapped in the wrong body” as a narrative that led trans lives to extreme medicalization.

Eugenio had a difficult experience with formal education. Even with medical support, schools were not always receptive. This became worse when he reached higher education. The University of Córdoba would not accept him as a man; he had to attend with his legal female name. Some years later, when he traveled to Cuba to study veterinary science, the combination of his parents’ prestige as Montoneros and the island’s obsession with medical knowledge gave him new degrees of acceptance.⁹⁵ The Montoneros group was respected in the island, and many members had lived in exile in Cuba during the dictatorship (1976–83), where they were militarily trained for a possible return to Argentina. Likewise, since the late 1970s, Cuban physicians have debated the nature of transsexuality. Under the influence of physicians from the German Democratic Republic, they opened a discreet service to treat people who needed what Cuban physicians defined as “sexual corrections.” The first publicly known sex change surgery happened on the island in 1988. However, publicity of this news created a backlash against transsexuality, and the island did not offer gender-affirmation treatments again until 2008.⁹⁶ Even if Cuba had a paradoxical opinion on the issue, the circulation of discourses about transsexuality in the late 1980s may have made Eugenio acceptable for certain social circles.

The construction of the binary between cis and trans bodies, between those bodies considered natural and those manufactured, relied on different degrees of violence. My expansive approach to embodiment practices also pays attention to how the state tried to preserve its sovereignty over trans bodies. Even if medical intervention could be useful for getting a certain degree of gender recognition, this was fragile. Outside his social circle, Eugenio's male embodiment was met with extreme violence. For example, when he was fifteen years old, he decided he wanted to explore the famous city nightlife of Córdoba. He went to a club that was a favorite among travestis and young heterosexual people, where he expected to find other men like him. Unluckily for him, the police organized a raid on the night of his visit to the club. While cisgender men and women were able to leave, the policemen segregated the travestis from the rest of the people to imprison. Eugenio ended up imprisoned, where he was victim of extreme police violence and sexually assaulted.⁹⁷

Eugenio's experience helps us understand how the violent construction of the boundaries between trans and cisgender bodies was archived in the bodies of trans people. Sexual assault was a terrible act with which police officers and other men defined the limits of masculinity: rape works as a rite of power, a mechanism with which the male community defines its boundaries, an act that builds hierarchies by marking certain bodies as inferior, penetrable, and female. Diana Taylor has pointed out how Argentinian state violence articulated long-rooted gendered notions of the nation.⁹⁸ The symbolic representation of Argentina as a weak feminine homeland that needed to be saved by strong male citizens has been enacted through time by violent performances over those bodies considered threatening or deviant. Rape is the greatest act of violation of someone's intimacy, an act of torture with which policemen reaffirmed their power—and, by extension, that of the state—over those bodies that they understood needed to be corrected. As Rita Segato theorizes, rape is usually a moralistic act that defines male belonging. Sexual assaults operate in a double code. One is a vertical disciplinary message to those bodies that state

agents feel need to be corrected by men, but more importantly there is also a horizontal code in which these acts of violence interact with a broader definition of male belonging. They are a performance for affirming membership in a male community.⁹⁹

The experience of regular imprisonment often brought trans people together in order to survive. Prison was a space in which to share knowledge of survival strategies: information about a place where someone could work, a house to stay in, or gender-affirmation practices. On the same night that Eugenio was imprisoned, a group of travestis who were imprisoned with him started an open struggle with the police, requesting that Eugenio remain in their cell under their care. Some hours later Eugenio's mother and a human rights lawyer got him out of jail. This was a starting point for Eugenio, an experience that helped him build a new travesti family, a group with which he would navigate new classifications of identity. Medical ideas do not always match with those of group classification. Travestis usually understood Eugenio as a *tortillera* (dyke) or *camionera* (literally, truck driver), labels usually used by lesbians and with which he navigated his gender ambiguity. But even if travesti language did not have appropriate words to describe him, his travesti friends understood that Eugenio was trying to affirm his own gender.¹⁰⁰ This bond also helped Eugenio to reinterpret his bodily experience and to engage with travestis' terminology to explore male transness (a self-definition that wasn't extended among trans men but that speaks about Eugenio's unique political experience).

Eugenio's life is an example of how the trans political response to state violence defined the tensions between LGBTTTIQ+ and human rights movements in postdictatorial Argentina. Likewise, as this book points out, his trajectory expresses the moral limits that determine who has been historically recognized as a valid victim of state authoritarianism and who has not, and how these distinctions affect our understanding of democracy. As I expand further in the next chapter, the continuity of state violence against trans people beyond transitions between dictatorial and democratic times helps us

reshape our understanding of the alleged universality of democracy as a system of peace.¹⁰¹

The experience in jail also transformed Eugenio's political ideas. Like many activists of his generation, his expectations were not met by the postdictatorial governments. Eugenio participated in the human rights movement from a young age; he enrolled in the organization for relatives of the victims of state terror, FAMILIARES, as well as HIJOS, the movement for sons and daughters of the disappeared. As an active member of the human rights movements, he felt disappointed at first with Raúl Alfonsín's decree, which protected low- and mid-level members of the military from being judged, and then by Carlos Saúl Menem's amnesty. Eugenio was also disappointed with the cis-heterosexual limits of the human rights movements. He felt conflicted about how most human rights movements restricted their claims to people persecuted for political issues narrowly defined and avoided talking about the state violence against gays and travestis during the new democracy. While apparent sexual freedom grew and the population recovered rights, Eugenio's friends still suffered police persecution. In his public interventions, he connected his conflicts between human rights and LGBTTTIQ+ activism with his first time in jail. The fact that the police tortured him literally in the same place where many of his family's friends had been imprisoned and tortured during the dictatorship made him feel that the struggle for democracy and freedom should not exclude travestis. He tried for years to get human rights movements to include LGBTTTIQ+ people, but it was not easy.¹⁰² The human rights organizations were under permanent public attack and perhaps fearful of the effects of such an alliance. Moreover, the idea persisted: the dictatorship's political repression should not be compared with other types of crimes committed by the armed forces for nonpolitical reasons. Even if challenging, in the twenty-first century, human rights figures such as the leader of the Plaza de Mayo Hebe de Bonafini would engage with travestis' activism, represented by figures such as Lohana Berkins.

During the 1990s and the 2000s in Argentina, the discourse about trans male experiences changed. The emergence of more visible discourses about trans experiences fostered common languages for identity formation. For example, in 1999 Kimberly Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry* changed the lives of many trans men.¹⁰³ The popular film narrates the true story of a transgender man in rural Nebraska called Brandon Teena, a tragic history that ended with the murder of the main character (something that might affect trans men's awareness of social hostility against them). The story introduced the term *gender dysphoria*, a concept forged in the United States to describe the experience of living in the "wrong body," that is, having an internal gender experience that contrasts with one's body.

In Córdoba in 1998, an activist group, Las Iguanas, formed by lesbians, bisexuals, and male transgender people, began publishing a magazine. One of the first issues openly talked about male transgenderism, driven by activists such as Mauro Cabral Grinspan. The magazine highlighted the concept of transgender to challenge the myths that "only men can be transgender (feeling like women)" and to vindicate "those of us who feel like men living in the wrong body."¹⁰⁴ According to Francisco Fernández Romero and Andrés Mendieta, this magazine "published articles by transgéneros masculinos and references to North American authors such as Leslie Feinberg and Aaron Devor." As they explained, this magazine was the first place where such terms as *transgénero* and *trans* were used in Argentina, in contexts in which the trans female community mostly used terms such as transexual and travesti.¹⁰⁵

Las Iguanas addressed the repertoire of male embodiment with humor. They provided tips on using baggy T-shirts to cover the *delantero* (front of the car, a reference to large breasts), discouraged false beards, and advised, "If you have a prosthesis, make sure that it is well placed and that it does not fall out of your trousers."¹⁰⁶

The emergence of the internet made possible new experiences of gender affirmation. Online, some Argentine trans men could familiarize themselves with medical concepts and access information about hormonal treatments. Moreover, beyond a level of practical

information, virtual culture was an unprecedented scenario for achieving control over one's embodiment with almost unlimited possibilities to control self-presentation—such as choosing a nickname or which photographs to show, or expanding the geographical frontiers of interaction. The internet shaped a new dimension of social reality, a material space for negotiating embodiment with others. For many trans men, the internet was one of the first places in which they were able to talk about themselves using male pronouns. For example, Oliver Nash points out in his autobiography that the internet became a vital space for those who lived their transition to adulthood in the twenty-first century: private Facebook groups and Twitter became a place to build a community, a place to put words to individual experiences and find others.¹⁰⁷

While there was not an explicit regulation about the use of hormones, the general policing of “sex change” treatments related to the banning of surgery since 1967 fostered the creation of alternative markets without medical advice. For example, a recent survey of trans men highlights that almost half of the participants pursued hormonal treatments without medical assistance.¹⁰⁸ As Eugenio's story shows, some trans men sought hormones in the private market, such as injectable testosterone. Usually, as happened with Eugenio, trans men accessed doses when they could afford them and depended on finding pharmacies where they could purchase them without answering many questions. Every experience with hormones was different; many talked about how the voice becomes progressively thicker and the muscles, appetite, and libido increase.

As happened with travestis and trans women's body experiences, the governance of sex produced an underground market in gender-affirming practices (many of them conducted abroad). Legally getting surgeries such as a double mastectomy was difficult; it could sometimes be approved by a judge, but getting legal permission was difficult. The permission usually required a medical diagnosis of breast cancer. During my fieldwork in Argentina, I heard stories of treatments performed under critical conditions, such as private unprepared installations, treatments that put the lives of many

people at risk. The passing of Argentina's Gender Identity Law in 2012 created a set of new challenges. State and private healthcare companies were forced to provide gender-affirmation treatments. However, as many activists point out, doctors had no training in an area that had been criminalized for decades. In this context trans men usually needed to negotiate the conditions of these treatments. As has been recently pointed out by organizations of trans men, such as *Hombres Trans Argentinos*, there are many cases of medical malpractice and discrimination, and also a shortage of hormones in public hospitals, due to the restrictions to importations.¹⁰⁹

Beyond the language of medicine and practices, other stories show how the expansive political language of LGBTTTIQ+ rights provided a vocabulary for understanding gender-nonconforming experiences. Kalym was born in Buenos Aires in 1965 into a low-income, working-class family that migrated from Tucuman, all of them members of an evangelical church.¹¹⁰ Kalym has thought of himself as male since he can remember. For most of his life he lacked the words with which to describe this, an identity to hold his experience. Since Kalym was four years old, he expected to grow up to "complete himself" and become a full boy. When he was eighteen, he started a romance with a girl from his neighborhood, which led to his expulsion from his home and the church and forced him to abandon school. In the following years, he made a living by tutoring high school students in subjects such as math and chemistry, which allowed him to build his male life: he bought his first rugby jumper, male underwear, and aftershave. No longer under his parents' tutelage, he felt comfortable to freely express his gender. He walked differently, as what some people called a *marimacho* (almost a macho).

However, some things changed. The girl he was dating went through "anti-lesbian conversion therapy" and announced that she was getting married to her therapist. Kalym started a stage of his life that he defined as "transformist": he abandoned his manly clothes to rebuild his relationship with his family and the church: he started dressing in "heels, shawl, and a long skirt" to go to church. Nonetheless, his evangelical transformism would not last. One day,

while doing religious social work, he met a woman running from a violent relationship, with a baby in tow—and Kalym built a romantic relationship with her that resulted in a new expulsion from the church. Kalym started life with his new partner and decided to raise the child with her. With autonomy from the church and with her support, Kalym felt free to build a manly life by buying men's clothing and wearing them in public. Without a job they lived in a precarious situation, spending some nights sleeping in a park. Given that scenario, Kalym decided to disguise himself as a woman to continue working as a tutor and with that to help his partner, raising her child in a common house as a family.

Like the media, activists' discourses were central to making new languages available with which others could identify. The 2000s were a decade of quick transformations. In 1999 Fernando de la Rúa got elected with the promise of ending the economic legacy of Carlos Menem. However, his government continued with the economic model based on the indexation of the Argentine peso to the US dollar and an increasingly unsustainable international debt, which in 2001 led to economic and political collapse. The subsequent street protests caused de la Rúa's resignation and opened a period characterized by a series of short governments unable to finish their terms. In 2003 a new cycle led by Néstor Kirchner (2003–07) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–15) opened a scenario characterized by the integration of social movements into the government, a growing economy based on the high prices of commodities (especially soy), the reduction of the Argentine international debt, the return of the trials of those responsible for the crimes during the last dictatorship, and the expansion of social and civil rights. As I expand upon in the next chapter, during the Kirchner governments, LGBTTTIQ+ movements established a strategic alliance with the government to achieve new legislation, such as the Equal Marriage Law (2010) and the Gender Identity Law (2012).

The context of the struggle for LGBTTTIQ+ civil rights in Argentina during the 2010s was more than a movement for legal changes. These fights established a new horizon of rights that contrasted with state restrictions and created a popular language

with which some people negotiated the conditions of their existence. These fights transformed Kalym's life. Kalym attended the parliamentary debates on equal marriage and decided to enroll in an LGBTTTIQ+ organization. First he participated in Las Fulanas, a lesbian and bisexual women's organization. He made new friends and felt that he belonged someplace. However, after being discriminated against in a location in which the organization was camping, he decided to come out and tell the other members that he considered himself a trans man. The organization decided to expel him, because the group was not for men. Although this separation was a difficult process, he got in touch with some Argentine Gay, Lesbian, and Trans Federation members. Through this organization, he accessed the Madres de Plaza de Mayo University, where they recognized his male gender, and he got his degree in social work.

While medical discourse primarily mediated other embodiments, Kalym reinterpreted his embodiment through political practice by building community. In 2012 Kalym participated in a trans men's camping trip. It was the first time in his life he was with others of his kind, and he experienced a big change in the way he understood himself. Back home he went to court to demand the rectification of his name, a strategy deployed by several trans activists. That same year the parliament passed the Gender Identity Law, and Kalym became the first trans man in Buenos Aires to get his new legal documents.

Kalym transformed his embodiment through politics. In contrast with others, he waited for his legal documents before starting gender-affirmation treatments. In the following years, Kalym got involved in the foundation of crucial grassroots organizations. With his partner he led a textile cooperative with which he created jobs for trans, gays, lesbians, bisexual, and even straight people without jobs.

In sum, these stories show some of the wide range of experiences of male transition during the last decades of the twentieth century and the first of the new millennium. Stories like those of Eugenio and Kalym point to how trans men navigated their male gender affirmation in a shifting context. The section demonstrates how new global and local discourses shaped the concepts with which they

made sense of themselves: from medical discourses translated by films to local activism.

New Horizons of Desire: Activism and Body Politics

On April 18, 2021, the trans media Urbana Trans posted photographs about encapsulated silicone merged with flesh that had been extracted by doctors from travestis' bodies—replicated by local activists. In their social media posts, activists insisted that by being banned from legally transforming their bodies, they now carry “explosives” in their flesh. Thus, far from considering technology a unidirectional and celebratory tool of modernization, trans people have had troubling experiences with body technologies, and multiple activists have developed critical discourses to address embodiment technology as the only path to affirm transness.

Experiences with biotechnological transformation have been as diverse as the political discourses around it. However, as I explain in [chapter 5](#), the politicization of the body was central to trans movements. The irregular circulation of knowledge prompted multiple reactions. Even if hormones promised to accelerate feminization, some trans women avoided them because of their side effects. In interviews some insisted that self-medication with hormones could “drive you crazy.” Other travestis told me that they have an alternative interpretation of hormones; they believed that hormonal mood swings could be understood as a patriarchal interpretation that linked craziness with female corporeality in order to patronize them. Many trans people told me that doctors are not trained to work with trans bodies. Travestis had difficulties finding people who were able to extract silicone without leaving them with huge scars. Some trans men told me that they felt extended effects of the administration of hormones without medical advice, such as in the case of Eugenio, who believed that the path of body normalization came at a high price in his case, making it impossible for him to ever conceive children.¹¹¹

Since the 1990s travesti/trans activism has addressed embodiment critically. By challenging the monopoly of medical discourse over

their bodies and embracing their particularities, activists have created alternative models of self-fashioning. In 1995 Mauro Cabral Grinspan, an intersex trans men activist and theorist, challenged those discourses that insisted that he would be “loved beyond the body.” In reflecting about his romantic experiences as an intersex trans man, he wrote:

I am writing a body that I can inhabit, enjoy, expose to the looks, the judgments, and the scorn, to the passions, to the clothes I like, the caresses and the burns, for which there is no word, no touch, no saliva, no savagery that does not shout to the four winds, despite this twist, that to begin with I love myself and that behind my desire for me perhaps I can find other forms of desire crossed in my other form of being a body.¹¹²

The appropriation of travesti identity from criminalization was inseparable from building pride in corporeal experiences. Berkins argued that it was necessary to highlight that there are “other alternative ways of living and understanding what it means to be *travesti*.”¹¹³ According to Marlene Wayar, Berkins considered that describing and performing travestis’ bodies with pride was a reaction to what she defined as a “sewage identity,” an identity into which society has placed everything considered negative.¹¹⁴ In a context in which identity has historically been mocked by journalistic discourse, she worked to highlight travesti beauty as a potent political tool. As Berkins frequently repeated in public demonstrations, “If I were to be born again, I would choose to be travesti,” a phrase usually repeated by other influential activists such as Claudia Pía Baudracco.

As with Deborah Singer’s image of her voluptuous beauty and pride, Berkins believed that it was necessary to transform being a travesti into something desirable, to alleviate the pressures that often led them to making violent decisions to shape their bodies. She would also do this with her public fictitious candidacy for the presidency. In 2003 Berkins defied the limits reserved for travestis and projected other possible universes in which they were not segregated from political power.

Berkins pointed out that travesti corporeality challenged binary and essentialist notions of gender and pushed the limits of politics beyond these.¹¹⁵ Her resistance to being reduced to a category reinforced her idea of identity as an open space related to diverse carnal experiences:

I don't want to be a woman, I don't even know what women are like, I want to be a travesti, which is what I am. I don't want to be a man either. I know the place where I don't want to be. I do know the place I'm trying to build, with what I can, with what I have and as far as it will go, but that's the biggest certainty I have. [. . .] They even emphasize sexual orientation, because if I go and say, "Look, I live with a woman," you'll say, "Didn't you want to be a woman?"¹¹⁶

In several interviews, Berkins pointed out that travestis challenged the expected link between corporeality and legal gender identity: they could have genitalia considered male and at the same time use female gestures without being classified either as women or men. She understood that gestures and corporeality were the main fields in the struggle of the making of travesti political identity; for example, she valued her voice as a travesti voice that could not be easily classified in a gender-binary perspective.¹¹⁷

Berkins understood feminism as an essential theory for placing the body at the core of political thinking. Feminist critiques of the alleged biological foundations of gender were powerful tools with which to rebuild the links between identity and corporeality, to consider identity as an embodiment that overflowed gender standards, rather than an expression of preexistent biological reality. Berkins's relationship with Argentine feminist activism was not easy. Even though since the 1970s feminist, lesbian, and homosexual/gay groups had created various alliances, there was often conflict, and many feminists refused to recognize travestis as subjects of feminist politics. Not without resistance from many feminists, Berkins participated in the National Women's Meetings—an annual conference that brings together most Argentine women's organizations.¹¹⁸ In her theory and work, Berkins worked to bring

together feminist and travesti struggles for body autonomy—those for abortion and for decisions over their gender. As she wrote:

It was a total commitment to feminism. We were saying: we have to build and question corporeality. But in what margin? What are the fields of negotiation and the limits that we intend to push forward? And for that, when we said what limits we should cross, we nurtured ourselves with feminism. So the first flag we held up as a demand for very concrete rights was that of abortion. There, again, we began to take up an issue that was not directly our own, but we did see the demand for ownership of the body as an absolute right, as Lucy Stone said in 1854: “I do not want the right to own and vote if I cannot keep my body as an inalienable right.” That claim to ownership of the body (in this case, the women’s right to decide when to have children, why to have them and with whom to have them) was vital for our agenda.¹¹⁹

Berkins’s shaping of feminist theory as a critique of the natural foundations of the body and its links to identity also helped her underscore how travestis displaced the centrality of genitalia at the cultural and legal fiction of sex. Her remarks rooted in travestis’ experiences of female embodiment without seeking to have a genital surgery, Berkins addressed the limits of the Western cultural frameworks to assign gender:

We (travestis) are people who build our identity by questioning the dominant cultural meanings of genitalia. Society makes readings of people’s genitals, followed by expectations about each person’s identity, abilities, social status, sexuality, and morality. It is considered that a body with a penis will be followed by a male subjectivity, and a body with a vagina will be followed by female subjectivity. Travestis break down this binary logic that is hegemonic in Western societies and that oppresses those who resist being subsumed into the categories of “men” and “women.”¹²⁰

Berkins’s activism to claim trans beauty impacted trans imaginaries. Elizabeth met her while writing her dissertation as an undergraduate student. By embracing a travesti interpretation of femininity, she decided to free herself from mainstream interpretations of “female duties.” It was complicated and took time, but she decided to stop forcing herself to use high heels when they were not comfortable or pushing herself to take hormones.¹²¹ Emma was in the subway when

she met Valeria, a trans woman who made an impact on her for her “female passing.” Valeria invited her to participate in a trans group associated with the Rojas Cultural Center, and that sometime later published *El Teje*—the first Latin American travesti magazine directed by Marlene Wayar. This group was the first step for Emma to start taking hormones and involved her in debates about travestis and trans beauty. It was a turning point; she discovered that she did not have to match cisgendered female beauty norms and she should not be ashamed of showing her trans features.¹²²

Likewise, travesti and trans activism challenged the healthcare services. Far from being passive patients waiting to be treated, travestis and trans people created knowledge, criticized medical preconceptions, and formulated a demand that transformed hospital services. Adrian is a psychiatrist and sexologist from the Durand Hospital in Buenos Aires. During the 2000s he started getting more trans patients, and many experienced side effects of the homemade gender-affirmation practices performed in the previous decades. In 2003 he started forming an interdisciplinary specialist group with a surgeon and an endocrinologist. The group grew slowly, using self-training to overcome the limits of medical training restricted to binary models. For the first few years, Adrian had to use the pathological category “gender dysphoria” to justify health services. The hospital did not want to risk a lawsuit, so he had to put up his registration as a guarantee and avoid any public exposure. The group grew. They affiliated with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). The experiences of fixing surgeries with technical issues helped them to develop enough experience to improve their techniques. In 2010 they performed their first vaginoplasty.¹²³

As I address in the following chapter, body politicization was at the base of trans agendas. Many activists and organizations worked to lower the expectations placed on the surgery, to avoid frustration. Far from transforming surgery into a goal and end point, activists promoted an integral conception of gender affirmation that could give alternative safe paths for younger generations. Along with

multiple activists and collectives, many collaborated to create a national organization, which achieved legal recognition that would change the conditions and debates surrounding trans embodiment practices.

* * *

By challenging state restrictions, travestis and trans men and women deployed embodiment repertoires to affirm their gender. In contexts in which medical intervention to support their gender affirmation was restricted, men and women performed their bodies in spaces of experimentation in the search for the body they dreamed of.

This chapter explores medical and informal spaces of body-knowledge production and circulation. It shows how trans people articulated multiple discourses and employed objects, from trousers to injected silicone, from hormones to state recognition, to make bodies of their own. The chapter shows how travesti and trans people shaped their repertoires to challenge state governance over sex and retain sovereignty over their bodies. Additionally, the chapter stresses how this exclusion created the precarious conditions of embodiment that defined trans experience.

This chapter also shows how body transformation plays a role in the making of trans belonging. As Berkins argued, identity and corporeality are interconnected and conflictive experiences.¹²⁴ Along these lines, this chapter shows how some activists deconstructed the technological promise of body transformation as a unique fulfilling path for trans people during the 1990s and 2000s. In this sense, the chapter shows how, along with producing creative technologies and negotiating their conditions of belonging with their communities, political critical body discourses allowed alternative interpretations of these transformations that embraced diverse embodiments and redefined the governance of sex.

CHAPTER 5

The Carnal Revolution

Trans Citizenship and the Limits of Democratic Transition



Figure 5.1. Travestis' demonstration in Plaza de Mayo. December 22, 1986. Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno (Argentina). Departamento de Archivos. Fondo Editorial Sarmiento. Subfondo Crónica. Sección Archivo. Subsección Archivo de redacción. Serie Sobres temáticos. AR00105349.

At the end of 1986 and into the new year, a group of fifty travestis protested in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires.¹ The media was quick to notice their protests at the heart of Argentina's political

center. A community usually excluded from daylight by police harassment burst into public view. These travestis had gathered to demand that the administration of President Raul Alfonsín, which had emerged after the bloody military dictatorship (1976–83), do something to stop the dozens of murders ravaging their lives and communities. They were exhausted and angry, but also happy to make themselves heard. The crowd presented a sharp contrast with traditional demonstrations in Buenos Aires. Here were not the families of victims of human rights violations, or manly trade unionists, but rather a group of fabulous and scandalous travestis. Waving banners, dressed in tight-fitting clothing with low necklines, the group defiantly challenged Argentine moralism while demanding their right to exist. One group, in plain sight of onlookers, opened their blouses and bared their silicone breasts so that all might see the bruises they had suffered from police violence.²

Journalists covering the event portrayed the demonstration as an immoral spectacle. As one older woman declared to a journalist, “Poor Alfonsín, look what he has to face.” The press described the demonstrations this way:

A little over twenty people carrying banners and wearing short skirts, low-cut dresses, and other stylish accessories under the presidential balcony called for the President or the Minister of the Interior to resign. Some people laughed, with euphoria or indignation, approved of or protested at the lack of morals and shame.³

Some months later, one of the travestis’ leaders, Mónica—who was compared with Saúl Ubaldini, the Peronist head of the workers’ trade unions that had organized multiple strikes against the new government—stated in the press that she wanted to be respected the same as any Argentinian citizen, because “we have been beaten, threatened and nobody cares, the government does not listen to us.”⁴

During the 1980s and 1990s, the travesti, transsexual, and transgender movements publicly challenged the cisgender limits of democracy. In times of democratic transition, these activists deployed different protest practices to reformulate the notion of democracy, to claim their right to free circulation and end the state

policing of their bodies. The trans movement formulated questions regarding material well-being and social justice, a language that connected to both the immediacy of the dictatorship and the memory of a benefactor state that proved less able as the decade continued to deal with the problem of sexual segregation.⁵ Moreover, they gained visibility in the context of a wider sexualization, a process of progressive openness about sexual topics in contrast with the censorship under the dictatorship, a process in which the lesbian, gay, feminist, and travesti movements participated in the redefinition of sexual citizenship.⁶

This chapter aims to study travesti, transgender, and transsexual struggle for citizenship as an embodied experience. It understands the role of daily violence, resistance, alternative discourses, and collective struggle for social justice as technologies of embodiment. Likewise, the text points out how the material experience of exclusion and practices of collective belonging were part of the making and unmaking of ephemeral citizenship.

Travestis, transsexuals, and transgender activists challenged the cisgender moral restriction of democracy by politicizing their bodies. As I analyzed with Butierrez, travestis transformed their sensual bodies into political weapons. The symbol of the protests—showing off their silicone breasts—signified both their female gender-affirmation practices and a rejection of their social exclusion. Showing their breasts was proof of their femininity, of their social exclusion, and of how civil and state violence shaped the production of their corporealities, often causing their early deaths. Travestis' scandalous political action challenged the moralism of democracy, leading to tensions with other actors, such as workers' or human rights movement activists.⁷

Even though the media in the 1980s and 1990s usually used travesti and transsexual as interchangeable concepts, this chapter explores the tensions between the developing identities and movements of these two groups and how their interaction was central to achieving state recognition of the right to gender self-determination. In contrast with the scandalous politics of travestis,

transsexual action constructed an alternative politics based on respectability and transformations of medical discourses. Using respectability as their main flag, transsexuals publicly advocated to distinguish themselves from travestis by insisting on their intention to normalize their bodies via genital surgeries, portraying their identities as the result of a medical condition and emphasizing how they embodied the image of the “good woman.” While travestis focused on the right to free movement, transsexuals made sex change into a public political issue. Transsexual politics created new debates that converged with the travesti agenda to demand the right to self-perceived gender recognition in the twenty-first century. Moreover, during the 1990s, the trans men’s movement started a path of visible political action that profoundly transformed sexual state policies.

In this chapter I argue that by claiming their right to free movement, to their bodies, and to live, travestis and transsexuals challenged the boundaries of social belonging. Here I take inspiration from works of previous scholars, such as Dehesa, Ochoa, and Vider, on the notion of citizenship that situates itself in everyday acts (such as walking down the street or being called by one’s name) in order to understand the politics of belonging with which trans people challenged social exclusion. This political, affective, and cultural practice goes beyond a standardized bundle of rights and duties that marks the status of individual membership before the state. It also means recognizing daily experience with violent interactions with the state, a bodily experience of material and subjective violence that daily condemned those who did not conform to binary gender norms. Throughout the book I understand citizenship as the processes that produce a person as part of a social group, that is, both the things that make one feel part of society and those that make society see one as a part of it—the material, emotional, legal, and practical ties that allow one to belong to a community.⁸

The chapter has four sections. First, it analyzes the midterm experience of state and civil violence as technologies of body (de)materialization. Second, it explores travestis’ politics of nudity

and their culture of body protest. Third, the text describes the politicization of transsexual and transgender bodies. Finally, it studies the strategic convergence of these agendas in the making of the Gender Identity Law of 2012.

The Body as a State of Siege

On March 10, 1999, a journalist wrote, “Yesterday morning the travestis’ struggle crossed borders and seas.” The statement was written in the context of the visit of the Prince of Wales to Argentina, when seventy travestis jumped over the fences of the British embassy to claim asylum. As usual, the police reacted brutally. The brave incursion into British territory, thirteen years after the loss of the Malvinas (Falklands) Islands war, was met with violence. The media showed the desperation of a group still waiting for the promising freedom of democracy, fighting courageously to escape, some of them—such as the Trans Memory Archive founding director María Belén Correa—traveling abroad into exile to avoid state terrorism. During the police attack at the embassy, one of the travestis suffered a terrible injury when one of her legs, which had been injected with liquid silicone, burst.⁹

The shattering of this leg by the police provides a clue to one of the main arguments of this book: political regimes are bodily experiences. Rather than thinking about state building and nation building from below, this monograph approaches these processes from the perspective of the body itself. Here, I am not referring only to elites’ concerns about how sexual deviation in general, and trans body transformation specifically, threaten the nation’s future; instead, I want to consider the everyday mechanisms with which police officers produced the public sphere through marginalized bodies. Lohana Berkins offers a helpful conceptualization of this process: “The restrictions on moving freely in the street with a subversive identity, the obstacles to accessing the basic rights of all citizens of this country, among others, make the lives of travestis a state of siege.”¹⁰ The testimonies about violence against travestis show that this state of siege was an experience inseparable from the

body. A good example of this is that when travestis were imprisoned, they were tortured by police; officers used doors to slam their breasts and break their silicone capsules, a form of assault that required major surgery, when it did not lead to death.¹¹ Placing this understanding of exclusion in the body is a starting point for understanding how, since the 1980s, the travesti, transsexual, and transgender movement would create multiple agendas, sometimes in parallel and even in conflict. But over the years these agendas interconnected demands for citizenship, free movement, body autonomy, and gender recognition.

Travestis' protests in the 1980s and 1990s resulted from the collisions of mid- and short-term processes. While the policies of persecution of trans people went beyond democratic and civil governments, the political scenario of the democratic transitions radically transformed the logic of protests and made available a new language for talking about individual rights. After the bloodiest dictatorship in Argentine history (1976–83), based on the disappearance and torture of those considered “subversives,” the long work of movements composed of victims' family members consolidated the discourse of human rights as a primary language of protest. The language of “exile” established a parallel between victims of political violence in the 1970s and more prolonged sexual violence directed against travestis, sex workers, and homosexuals. These apparent tensions express how the language of human rights became an expansive platform for different subjects of protests that criticized the unfulfilled promises of democracy.

Moreover, an unprecedented sexualization of public life also characterized postdictatorial Argentina. Sexuality became a terrain in which Argentine society also struggled to define the meaning of freedom in the emerging democracy. While heterosexuals enjoyed the benefits of the end of the military censorship, the new lesbian and gay movements challenged the continuity of discrimination and state violence against the queer community—an agenda that converged but also created conflicts with the travesti and transsexual movements, as seen in the following sections. In 1984 several groups

merged to found the Argentine Homosexual Community (CHA). The group promoted an image of middle-class gay men and constructed a politics of respectability to challenge social discrimination. In the following decades, activists created diverse organizations. New leaders, such as the gay male historian Carlos Jauregui and the lesbian feminist Ilse Fuskova, became public figures and encouraged visibility as a political path for activists. During the 1990s organizations such as Gays for Civil Rights (GDC, 1991–96), the Society for the Integration of Gays and Lesbians of Argentina (SIGLA, 1994), and Lesbianas a la Vista (Visible Lesbians, 1996), among others, emerged.

In 1983 the election of Raúl Alfonsín (1983–89) also fostered expectations about the new democracy. Adair shows that Alfonsín pledged to prosecute the armed forces and linked democracy and human rights to society's well-being. However, failures in both areas caused the collapse of the government. After the first judgment against some of the military leaders of the dictatorial governments (1985), and the human rights commission report called *Nunca más* (*Never Again*, 1984), a military rebellion forced the government to end the policy of judging those responsible for human rights violations. Likewise, the government's inability to overcome the economic legacies of the dictatorship led to hyperinflation, leading to economic collapse, which forced Alfonsín to call early elections. Even though he promised to increase wages and protect the national industry, the newly elected president, Carlos Menem, became the face of the neoliberal era. His administration drastically transformed the country by disassembling the social state, privatizing state-owned companies, and creating macroeconomic policies that tied Argentina's currency to the US dollar. While these shock policies fostered macroeconomic stability, the social cost led to a new crisis. In 1995 unemployment was at 18 percent, and poverty quickly increased to 50 percent of the country's population. This level of social precarity prompted the emergence of new social movements, such as the unemployed workers' organizations (*piqueteros*) and the formation of worker-owned cooperatives, among others. The collapse of the Argentine bank system and the policy of indexation of

the Argentine peso to the US dollar in 2001 caused a popular rebellion and the beginning of a new postneoliberal political cycle.

This convulsive transition to democracy would be the scenario in which travestis would bring debates about state violence into the public arena. Travestis faced multiple legal mechanisms of exclusion with which police officers tried to eradicate them from public life, condemning them to imprisonment. In Argentina—as in other Latin American countries—the impact of liberalism led to the decriminalization of all private sexual practices between consenting adults during the late nineteenth century. Although liberal laws failed to stop the policing of sexuality, the lack of a legal ground for the persecution of men who had sex with other men granted them a higher degree of freedom than that experienced by men in countries where such sexual practices were outlawed.¹² During the twentieth century, the policing of public space based on social class, race, and sexuality produced formal and informal practices of violence that blurred the limits between democracy and dictatorship for some marginalized groups. Travestis' bodies were supposed to be erased from everyday life, transforming them into mere creatures of the night. Their bodies became the material upon which state agents printed the limits of citizenship, submitting them to inhuman treatment.

The convergence of the crisis of the cultural, economic, and political liberal project with the growing fears of local elites about the effects of urban modernity led to a more active state intervention to improve “public morality.” Since the 1930s the global debate about public morality boosted the creation of legislation that likened sexuality and politics as complementary components of social order. Local and provincial governments passed legal mechanisms that repressed young people, the urban poor, prostitutes, and sexual dissidents. In 1932 the city of Buenos Aires penalized those who “who display themselves in public streets dressed or disguised in clothes of the opposite sex” or “incite or publicly offer a carnal act, without distinction of sex,” and criminalized “the subjects known as perverts in the company of minors under 18 years.”¹³ The province of

Buenos Aires put similar restrictions in place in 1955, condemning scandal and the offer of sex in public spaces, and in 1966 punishing those who “in everyday life dress and pass themselves as a person of the opposite sex.”¹⁴ The northern province of Formosa penalized homosexuality by sanctioning every “person of either sex who publicly or privately offers to perform sexual, perverse, or homosexual acts, or incites the public to perform such acts”; moreover, “[a]nyone who dresses or passes himself off as a person of the opposite sex shall be punished with arrest for three to fifteen days.”¹⁵ Something similar happened in the province of Santiago del Estero, which imprisoned anyone who “is publicly displayed in clothes of the opposite sex, whenever habit represses him.”¹⁶ Throughout the country the local authorities empowered police to remove those considered sexually deviant from public space, fostering and condoning informal police violence against sexual dissidents, such as beatings, imprisonment, rape, and torture.

The experience of state violence forged another level of knowledge and collaboration among travestis and transsexuals, for example, avoiding going out during daylight, always using alternative routes, and avoiding avenues where there were usually police posts. Every attempt to express themselves during the daytime was risky. In 1983 Magalí Muñíz—who currently works at the Trans Memory Archive—took a picture of herself in a public park in Mar del Plata while wearing her female clothes. In the photograph’s description, the archivist underscored that she took it quickly because she feared imprisonment: “Magalí risking being arrested for taking a photo in a public square. The local law banned the use of clothes from the opposite sex.” This was an everyday experience among those trying to leave home during daylight hours.¹⁷

Recent documentary films have gathered valuable testimonies about police abuse. The documentary *Los Maricones* shows that in Córdoba, policemen deprived travestis of toilets and tortured and raped them. They deployed mechanisms to disembody travestis’ femaleness, like cutting their hair or forcing them to grow beards.¹⁸ There are numerous examples of haircuts being used to record the

intimate violation of body sovereignty. As I explain in [chapter 2](#), during the so-called Desert Campaign—a military action that took place between 1878 and 1885, during which the Argentine state expanded over Indigenous territories—creole soldiers cut captives' hair. Hair was thought to be an intimate expression of bodies considered uncivilized for their gendered and social expression, and for that reason, unproductive for the nation. During the twentieth century, conservative groups condemned the use of the mustache, calling it a symbol of debauchery. In the years before the military coup of 1976, far-right organizations made public declarations inviting the public to beat homosexuals and cut their hair.¹⁹ At the same time, policemen forced travestis to grow body hair. The activist and scholar Marlene Wayar described being raped by a policeman when she was a young teenager in Córdoba, something considered normal among travestis as a form of payment to use public space.²⁰

However, while Argentine queer historiography usually focuses excessively on state agents' brutality against LGBTTTIQ+ people, it becomes more challenging to reconstruct the civil violence that also produced trans precarity. Far from being a political initiative of the state, moral violence was in line with civil society. Journalists played a vital role in the production of hatred against trans people. The media portrayed travestis and transsexuals' lives in jokes and circulated violent narratives that celebrated violence against them. The mainstream media usually referred to travestis and transsexuals using male articles, with titles such as “Males want to be females, but they don't allow them [masculinie],”²¹ and laughed at hate crimes committed against them, as in “The Dismembered [Man] of Arrecife”²² and “The Female Cat Was a Tom Cat.”²³ Journalists thus pushed travestis' bodies beyond the limits of the human.

Civil violence usually started in family domestic spaces. Some studies pointed out that many families expelled their trans sons and daughters from an early age.²⁴ The famous travesti vedette Deborah Singer told the press that only her mother accepted her.²⁵ Travestis usually said that their mothers were more open to accepting them, in contrast with their fathers. This was the case of Rosita, a travesti who

was murdered at age seventeen while selling sex. She was born in 1970 into a working-class family in the southern Buenos Aires metropolitan area. Rosita started using makeup and wearing dresses when she was thirteen, but her stepfather did not tolerate it, beating her and giving her an ultimatum: she could live in his house only if she were a “real man.” That’s how, at fourteen years old, Rosita moved in with her two friends Jackie and Debora. After four months she put on two silicone breasts and started working on the street. A client killed Rosita by beating her and burning her body with cigarettes.²⁶

The stories of civil exclusion multiply in the archives. Monica was born in 1952 in the province of San Luis. In an interview with a newspaper she said:

I have been a homosexual since birth. My old man noticed but could never understand it. I worked in a soda factory. He mistreated me. With Mom, it was different. She worked in a hairdresser’s. I studied hairdressing, cosmetology, and then I worked with her. When I was seventeen, she passed away, and then I left home. I was already dressing as a woman. At nineteen, I started dating a senior federal police officer. I began to work in a cabaret doing lip-sync, striptease. It was clear. I didn’t earn any money, so I went to the capital and became a whore.²⁷

The archivist trans-sex worker Ivana Tintilay described daily social violence as a form of permanent imprisonment. She wrote:

I remember 1987, when almost every night we had to defend our house from some asshole’s outrage who, to have fun, threw rocks at our house and shouted at us, “You stinking sods, you’re going to infect us all! Get out of the rotten neighborhood! Die!” On one occasion, they stoned the house of Juana Sanchez, my travesti mother, and we had to go out with sticks and dogs to defend our dignity and our territory.²⁸

Travestis also could suffer the violence of *chongos*. Usually defined by the press as “crimes of passion,” the murders of travestis by their male lovers reflected the fear of some men of being expelled from the masculine imaginary community. By beating a feminized body, *chongos* rejected their classification as gays and, in contrast, imagined themselves as members of an extensive male community

with an uncontrollable sexual desire that sometimes could have sex with travestis, transsexuals, or maricas without losing status. Characters such as “taxi boys”—popular names given to male sex workers—were surrounded by a moral panic for their alleged participation in murdering their homosexual and travesti clients.²⁹

Thinking about violence from below and centering it in the body means developing a more situated understanding of violence that interconnects laws and practice in a particular territory and on a particular subject. In the case of travestis, the roads where many of them offered sexual services became sites where police, media, and civil violence converged. As I have described with Butierrez in the late 1980s, the murder of dozens of travestis flooded national news. These crimes were performed on the national highway that connects Buenos Aires with the whole hemisphere, where travestis and cisgender sex workers offered sexual services. It was a dangerous place, with cars speeding by; travestis had to watch out for the police and the drivers.³⁰ The press reported that 180 travestis regularly offered sex services on the Pan-American Highway—the reason they named it *travestilandia* (travestiland).³¹ Some travestis died trying to avoid police capture, run over by cars while running from one side of the road to the other. The media described these deaths mockingly. One journalist spotlighted his hypotheses about the multiple murders: those responsible could be ciswomen sex workers’ pimps who were fighting over territory; there had been a fight between travestis; an ultra-right-wing group was dedicated to killing them; there was a serial killer on the loose; or a lesbian religious cult was guilty of the crimes.³² Tabloids often published pictures of travestis’ bodies destroyed by cars or perforated by their clients’ gunshots. Journalists also posted long articles about the silicone in the victims’ corpses and mocked their alleged “false sex.”³³ The newspaper archive is full of such stories. For example, Sandra was shot from a van while selling sex and was disabled for life due to the injuries.³⁴ Marcia declared in the press that some men played a game that involved running over travestis with their cars.³⁵ Shirley, who

was forty years old, was running to avoid a night in prison when a car ran over her and ended her life.³⁶

Social, state, and media violence has a role in shaping how bodies behave in public spaces. Travestis' archiving of violence also produced information about the danger and emotional distress that prevented some travestis from moving in public spaces. Mary was born in Entre Ríos in the 1960s. In 1987, interviewed by a reporter before heading out to offer sexual services on the street, she stated: "I go to work scared. I don't know if I'll make it back home, if I'll go back to sleep or if someone will kill me. [. . .] In a few months, thirteen travestis have been killed. One has that fear left. I only work until ten o'clock at night because I'm terrified. There are few people in the street at night [. . .] I have a very bad life. At night I think a lot about Gina [a friend of hers who was killed]. She was perfect. I think that I could be the next victim." In contrast to other travestis, Mary preferred to move around during the day. Maybe this was because, according to the journalist who interviewed her, "it is difficult to tell whether or not she was a [cisgender] woman." Mary's cisgendered passing allowed her to move with fewer difficulties than her fellow travestis, even though many still were terrified by the dangers of the dark.³⁷

Ivana Tintilay described the restrictions travestis placed on themselves in order to survive as an eternal lockdown. She and others used to stay at home because they were afraid of violence. Sometimes they requested help to do the groceries, because even a trip to the shop could lead to a police detention. While writing about COVID-19, Tintilay reflected:

Our lockdown began in our childhood, we began to hide our fears, our anguish, our doubts, to feel the pain of the tortuous internal dialogue, all alone. Since childhood, most of us had grown up in a hateful place: our own home. In our adolescence, anxious for some breathing space, we had to flee to some big city that offered us certain anonymity, a kind of sexual exile. But no, in the city of lights and neon lights, freedom and democracy, a long quarantine was waiting for us with open arms, preventing us from going out into the streets, to avoid the systematic police arrests. Going out to the supermarket was to avoid the horrified looks of the people, the mocking

laughter of the groups of men, who then appeared alone and smiling to request our sexual services. The social distancing of today? It's nothing compared to what happened in our community, when people were distancing themselves from us or calling the law to expel us from a place.³⁸

While state agencies' power over travestis' uses of public space began to decline in 1998, with the reform of the legal code in Buenos Aires city (brought about by the protests of sex workers and travestis), it nevertheless continued informally in the capital. Meanwhile, police repressive powers remained active in several cities and provinces during the first decade of the new millennium. In other regions, such as Buenos Aires province, provincial police officers continued imprisoning travestis legally, using public morality legislation. In 2005 forty-seven-year-old M. was detained for being in a car with a lawyer who claimed that she had cheated him because he thought "she was a woman." During her first detention, the police officers emphasized that they were confused since she had "long hair" and wore a "green mini-skirt" but that, in their opinion, "she was not a woman, she was a travesti."³⁹ In 2006 J., who was thirty-four, was stopped by a police officer for inciting a scandal for being in the street with a "tight net shirt with her breasts in the air, heels and mini-skirt." These are just traces of the cases of ongoing repression accumulated in the police archives.⁴⁰

This section shows how media, police, and civil violence converged in excluding trans people from public spaces. The continuity of these policies from above and below helps us understand how fundamental rights, such as free circulation, were inseparable from one's body. The material exclusion of travestis and transsexuals from public spaces—concrete acts of violence, from beating and imprisonment to elimination—are an excellent example of one of the main arguments of this book: citizenship is a bodily experience. State policing was archived and built through those excluded bodies. In this sense, because body and citizenship are inseparable, in the other sections I will show how travesti and transsexual politicization of their bodies in the following decades was essential for challenging the moralistic limits of democracy.

The Best Weapon for the Struggle: A Pair of Silicone Breasts

While the state and civil society imprinted the boundaries of social belonging on marginalized bodies, the communities made up of those bodies deployed multiple practices to challenge moralistic restrictions.⁴¹ From seeking to negotiate with the police and collecting food and money for those in prison to scandalous protests during the 1980s, travestis placed their bodies in public space to claim social recognition. Tired of police abuse and civil violence, travestis made scenes in public and attacked police stations whose officers were harassing travestis while working, and demanded better conditions inside prisons.⁴²

Travestis often spent a considerable part of their lives behind bars. Jail was a place where they suffered but also met friends and protested. Travestis turned jails into communal spaces. While sharing food, a blanket, or marijuana, they spent hours talking. As for other characters on the sidelines of public life, travestis, during imprisonment in police stations and jails, shared love stories, tips on how to avoid the police and deal with clients, and information about gender-affirmation techniques.

Indeed, these practices were not new. Malva's memoir records that in the 1950s, *maricas* used to organize night parties in jail and hold small Carnivals and costume contests.⁴³ While researching the federal prison system's photographic archive, the archivists introduced me to other pictures of people with nonconforming gender identities—maybe travestis or maricas—that the archivist of the police classified as “Mujeres (?)” Even though the photos had no dates, a conversation with the current archivists about the material and clothing allows us to presume that they were taken in the late 1940s and the mid-1950s. This collection shows that trans and marica incarceration created a life in common and how, far from being only a disciplinary space, it was also used for gender experimentation.⁴⁴ Police officers produced many of the following pictures under conditions of inequality. The reproduction of these

images is restricted, but they recollect scenes of life in prison with historical performative humor. Those photographs reproduce traditional figure images using bathrobes, tight trousers, and dresses. Their flamboyant performances on camera disturb the conventional portrayal of spaces of discipline.

The evidence shows that is possible to imagine that during the twentieth century police officers registered their coexistence with travestis and people with nonconforming gender identities in prison. The photographs offer us an inside glimpse into the everyday life of trans people in those cells, that life in common in which they developed a shared sense of being. Also, in their production many of these negatives show a certain degree of negotiation—I would call it—a collusion between what the photographer and the photographed desired. Azoulay points out that photography always presents itself as a product of an alleged agreement; it erases the inequalities that produced it.⁴⁵ I am aware of the risks of publishing pictures that could reproduce the historical violence against these bodies. However, these photographs allow us to imagine the multiple experiences that were not preserved in the archive, all those moments of prison that have never been captured and that attest to how the Argentine state violated trans human rights. But more importantly, these images suggest a counternarrative of images not only used to shame and mock travestis, a counternarrative that recovers travestis' agency to negotiate—even in the worst conditions—their gendered portrayal.

I am interested in tracing the varied ways in which trans people reacted to state violence. Here I borrow Fernández Galeano's proposal for a transhermeneutic to navigate the conflicts over how historical writing can work with "visual materials created by trans women, even when archived as part of their prosecution, provide a means to reach beyond a forensic analysis and toward transhermeneutics, namely, trans women's reading of their own self."⁴⁶ The collection of photographs of trans people in police stations and jails produces conflicting emotions. While it is impossible to avoid feeling ashamed, as an Argentine citizen, of how

our state violated their basic rights, these photographs also recall performances of contesting acts with which trans people transformed cells into scenarios for a sexy, erotic, and sometimes hilarious performance of femininity. I borrow here Ann Cvetkovich's expression "an archive of feelings" in order to understand the complex accumulation of emotions and feelings with which trans people actively shaped these criminal and journalists records and how these photographs accumulate many forms of "rage, intimacy, grief, shame and more that are part of the vibrancy" of their cultures, how they left material that is the testimony not only of their existence but also of their desire to portray their "way of life" as a desirable possibility.⁴⁷

Photography in imprisonment also continued over the following decades. The collection of pictures taken in jail by journalists of the Sarmiento Press in the National Library, held in the press archive of the library, expresses how with the explosion of biotechnological embodiment practices, travestis started using their bodies to negotiate the conditions of imprisonment. One can imagine that experience of dealing with the guards inside and outside jail. The conflictive relationship with guards is well expressed in a recent interview that Ivana Tintilay conducted with Marcela "La Rompe Coches"—a sex worker who was famous in the press for destroying the cars of cisgender people who were harassing travestis. Marcela describes how they negotiated the conditions of selling sex with police officers in the 1980s: paying them to avoid going to jail, sometimes having sexual encounters, and even dating some policemen.⁴⁸ Despite this, as recent testimonies of travestis and trans women in the context of human rights trials show, we must also consider that they were victims of extremely violent sexual assaults and torture. It becomes impossible to understand these photographs without considering this nonrecorded history of violence.

Many of these journalistic photographs include travestis in sexy poses and showing their breasts. As one journalist wrote, "Some people find police stations boring, others find them hilarious."⁴⁹

Having a photo taken could also be useful for ameliorating extreme violence; for the travestis it was better to be in front of the camera lens than under the police truncheon. The photographs show some travestis performing sexy poses or hilarious poses of overfeminization. As one journalist described, “The police told the little girls to stop, but they made fools of themselves.”⁵⁰ In her dictionary of travesti slang, Marlene Wayar refers to *hacerse la tonta* (playing dumb) as a strategic attitude they used to negotiate certain conditions by hiding their real purpose.⁵¹ Flashing their breasts may have been a way of *hacerse la tonta*, a body expression aimed at weakening the terrible conditions of imprisonment or getting something they wanted. Travestis smiled at the camera with their breasts on display, using their feminine bodies to arouse male rage.

Even in such a totally unequal situation, in which guards violently claimed their power over travestis, the latter attempted to bend the conditions of their imprisonment as much as possible. The photographs themselves should also be seen as spaces of conflict, an interplay of gazes and poses with which the travesti subjects negotiated their future readings. Prisons and police stations were not places in which one expected to express joy or sexiness, and while exhibiting breasts was a situation forced by police officers, it could also be an act that revealed a challenging attitude. Transforming a distressing situation such as detention into a photo session was perhaps a way of appropriating that space the best way they knew how: performing a fabulous and scandalous femininity. In those violent spaces in which many of them were subjected to torture and rape, showing one’s breasts implied challenging the emotional constitution of the space. A photograph was a statement of agency over journalists’ discourse—an opportunity to show their readers the reality of their beautiful bodies. To position oneself as an object of desire in a male-dominated space was a challenge to the dominant narrative of the press. Countering those who would undermine travestis’ femininity, showing their breasts was proof of their female embodiment and sex appeal, as well as mocking the moralistic judgments of their bodies. The production of those breasts and the

violence against them were among the leading causes of death for travestis, because of the hatred they generated among those who considered them a transgression against nature and because of the unhealthy conditions of their production (i.e., silicone injections). Transforming those hated and mocked bodies into icons of male desire broke the moral proscriptions that rendered the police station a space of suffering. Photography was a technology to record and preserve their gendered existence over time. During the twenty-first century, activists such as Claudia Pía Baudracco struggled for the right of incarcerated trans people to have a separate space in federal prisons in which the institutions recognized their gender, they could avoid violence from other prisoners, and they claimed space for self-development.⁵²

Even if democracy and dictatorship were not so different for travestis because sexual persecution continued—especially for those selling sex in the street—the democratic transition promoted a discourse that promised to amplify citizenship and access to civil rights. The photographs in jail reinforce the physical experience of state violence, as well as how travestis created common knowledge and tried to negotiate the conditions of imprisonment. The erotic charge of these photographs could be read as connected to the erotic body politicization with which travestis publicly challenged the rules of democratic transition. In this context, gay, lesbian, and feminist organization grew and struggled to redefine the limits of heteroandrocentric citizenship. While the HIV-AIDS crisis transformed gay organizations by expanding their embrace of a familial civil discourse in the search for the democratic integration of cis gays and lesbians, travestis and transsexuals claimed their right to their bodies and existence.⁵³ As I described with Butierrez, travestis met in police stations and prisons, on the streets and highways where they sold sex, and at gatherings with friends in which they created an idea of the need of creating a common political ground. In 1986 a police raid resulted in the murder of Fabiola, an eighteen-year-old Paraguayan travesti. Her friends went through an exhausting ritual: claiming the body, giving the news to the

mourning relatives, organizing an improvised burial, and collecting money to cover the service. After Fabiola's burial, travestis gathered in small groups and went to Plaza de Mayo to start the travesti revolution.⁵⁴

As I have reconstructed with Butierrez, on December 21, 1986, a group of provocatively dressed travestis crowded in the middle of Plaza de Mayo, carrying banners that read, "We want tolerance," "Enough abuse," and "We want equal rights."⁵⁵ The protest surprised a hundred passersby and a group of journalists who came, curious to know what was happening. The travestis showed the blows and scars of their various battles with police, pimps, or clients. One of them took off her blouse and showed her breasts, which were covered in bruises from a police beating. The photographers tried to take pictures, while other onlookers covered their faces in shame.⁵⁶ Monica and Deborah (Singer), two of those who gave interviews to the press, stated: "What is there to talk about in terms of human rights if they even stop us in the street while we are tiptoeing and they invent acts of prostitution?"⁵⁷

Travestis' scandalous and voluptuous eroticism challenged the political languages of democratic protest. As I analyzed with Butierrez, they disputed the universal subject of demonstrations—usually represented by trade-unionist workers or family members from human rights movements—by placing their bodies at the core of the conflict in the face of the Argentine state's moralistic restrictions. Travestis were not the classic workers following their trade unions, nor were they members of human rights movements, who in those years were still fighting for justice. Although they were clear about the words with which they challenged society and the state, silhouettes modulated with silicone did not fit into the history of Buenos Aires protest culture. With a glamorous sensuality, they demanded to be able to work without being killed by the police, to be treated like human beings. After 1986 travestis became political subjects in the media and TV. Travestis displayed their images in demonstrations and banners but also on the pages of magazines.

Through their activism, travestis have exposed the continuity of anti-trans repression in democratic times.⁵⁸



Figure 5.2. *Humor*, no. 187 (January 1987). Archivo: Fondo Marcelo Ernesto Ferreyra. CeDInCI.

In the 1980s, human rights movements renovated the classic repertoire of left culture, developing new strategies to draw citizens' attention. Feminist, gay, lesbian, and travesti groups conquered public attention by making a scene.

As I have previously highlighted in my collaborations with Butierrez, travestis challenged the moralism of Argentine protest culture. Comic strips in *Humor* magazine point to these contrasts by comparing the travestis' protest with other demonstrations and underscoring anal sex to define travestis' public action. The anus was a metaphor for domination in working-class male mainstream discourse; since the beginning of the last century, workers unions

have used images of anal penetration as a metaphor for bourgeois exploitation.⁵⁹ The stories of conflict between labor movements and subjects publicly portrayed as sexually deviant allow us to understand how moralism played a vital role in the working-class imagination.⁶⁰ A good example of this happened in 1982 when, during one of the dozens of workers union protests that characterized the end of the dictatorship, Elenita, a thirty-year-old travesti, showed her breasts at a demonstration of civil servants. The police tried to imprison her, supported by the protesters who felt that her presence delegitimized their claim. Elena reported that she had been raped by five policemen a few days earlier and that she could not present her legal claim.⁶¹ This case shows the moralistic limits of the labor movements' politics of class belonging, and how these movements distinguished themselves from subjects publicly portrayed as sexually immoral and weak, such as sex workers and travestis.

Travestis' scandalous political performance can be connected with a long history of disruptive shirtless bodies in Argentine politics. As Butierrez and I previously analyzed, media portrayal of travestis as uncivilized subjects invading the city could be read as part of a history of the cultural elites' attempt to minimize the popular masses' participation in public life. In the mid-twentieth century, the figure of the *descamisado* (shirtless male worker) articulated both the increasing visibility of urban dark-skinned working classes into politics and the cultural elites' moral panic in the presence of the masses in the public space. During the period of classic Peronism (1945–55), Juan Domingo Perón and his wife, Evita, usually referred to *descamisados* positively to portray male workers' bodies as a symbol of a significant social transformation in Argentina. The *descamisado* was central to Peronist rhetoric because it emphasized how virilized working-class men displaced a male oligarchy that had previously dominated the nation. Peronists represented *descamisados* as manly working-class men with open shirts and muscular chests. In contrast with this positive representation of popular classes, the urban middle classes and cultural elites

represented Peronist workers as prepolitical subjects motivated by sexually uncontrollable impulses by using racialized symbols. They used the term *cabecitas negras* (little black heads)—the name of a local bird—to confront working-class migrants from other provinces. This concept linked the darker skin of the inhabitants of northern provinces with the supposed lack of civilization of its Indigenous and working-class heritage, which threatened Argentina's fate as a European South American nation.⁶² During the 1980s travestis also experienced the same paradoxes. While the media portrayed them as uncivilized subjects invading the city, travestis used their erotic performance to call public attention to their social demands.⁶³

Travestis' mobilizations also disrupted the rules of the feminist, gay, and lesbian movements. As I explain in the previous section, lesbian and gay organizations multiplied after the end of the dictatorship in 1983. In contrast with the first movements of the 1970s that focused on social revolution, the new organizations focused on human rights by challenging social discrimination and police abuse in the 1980s; since the late 1990s these groups have concentrated on civil rights, such as the recognition of civil unions. During the 1980s and 1990s, lesbian and gay organizations multiplied their activities, such as the organization of the first pride parade in 1992. The movement and its organizations quickly grew, along with internal conflicts between the sectors of the movement that tried to portray themselves as "respectable" citizens in order to be socially included and those who believed in other strategies for achieving a radical transformation of democracy.⁶⁴



Figure 5.3. Travesti showing her breasts during a demonstration. Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno (Argentina). Departamento de Archivos. Fondo Editorial Sarmiento. Subfondo Crónica. Sección Archivo. Subsección Archivo de redacción. Serie Sobres temáticos. AR00105349.

During the 1990s travesti, transsexual, and transgender organizations likewise multiplied. In 1991 Karina Urbina founded *Transexuales por el Derecho a la Vida y a la Identidad* (Transdevi, Transsexuals for the Right to Life and Identity), and in 1993 María Belén Correa and Claudia Pía Baudracco created the *Asociación Travesti Argentina* (ATA). After years of exile in Italy, Baudracco had returned home with an idea: travestis could enjoy freedom, and they needed to fight for it. After the police imprisoned one of their friends in 1993, she and Correa created the basis of the first travesti organization (ATA). That same year, Kenny de Michelis, Gabriela Carrizo, and Sandy González created *Travestis Unidas* (TU). A year later, in 1994, Lohana Berkins started the *Asociación de Lucha por la*

Identidad Travesti y Transexual (Association for Travesti and Transsexual Struggle, ALITT).⁶⁵

In this context, the emergence of travesti and transsexual movements would produce conflictive alliances with the members of the movement. While some transsexual and travesti activists achieved good relationships with many leaders of the movements—such as the president of Gays for Civil Rights, Carlos Jauregui—they also needed to fight for their visibility. Berkins said that although travestis and transsexuals contributed money for gay pride demonstrations, some refused to name them on pamphlets and banners until 1994, when they renamed the Buenos Aires Pride demonstrations to include “travesti and transsexual” pride.⁶⁶

Travestis’ provocative protests also provided a contrast to the cautious actions of “respectable” mainstream lesbian and gay organizations. Travestis engaged in scandalous demonstrations in 1986 and 1987, at least five years before the first gay pride demonstration celebrated in 1992 in Buenos Aires, where people were encouraged to participate with masks. As I analyzed with Butierrez, the masks were supposed to protect the identities of those protesters who were scared of the costs of coming out.⁶⁷ Travestis, in contrast, did not use masks. Unlike middle-class lesbians and gays, they had little to lose; society had already taken everything from them.⁶⁸ Travestis had been excluded from their homes, schools, and jobs. Likewise, they brought their Carnival expertise, in which skin was a powerful attraction, to demonstrations. Travestis—who were usually the most expelled from the movement—thought of different strategies to place themselves at the core of pride demonstrations. In their pursuit to negotiate between the pride politics of respectability and their aim to avoid being stopped by police, the ATA, led by María Belén Correa and Claudia Pía Baudracco, decided to wear jeans and tight pink T-shirts with the organization’s logo.

In 1996, following a constitutional reform in 1994 that transformed the capital city into an autonomous territory, the Buenos Aires city assembly called upon citizens to discuss a new local Magna Carta. In addition to other reforms, the assembly planned to

reconsider the local codes that policed public space. Travestis' organizations participated in a broader coalition with gays, lesbians, human rights associations, progressive feminists, former MPs such as the historian Dora Barrancos, and sex workers to demand the end of police persecution and an article that guaranteed antidiscrimination. The coalition was part of the emergence of broader political alliances between different social movements in the face of neoliberal reforms and an expression of the long work of the LGBTTTIQ+ movement to criticize police violence. This coalition was also a reaction against the politics of neighborhood groups and police officers who campaigned for the eviction of travestis from the city's wealthier districts.⁶⁹ During the 1990s travestis, gays, and feminist lawyers organized demonstrations in front of police stations and presented claims against police abuse in national and international courts. This was a struggle that often cost them detentions and beatings.⁷⁰ In 1998 travestis, gays, and lesbians forced the local government to abolish the moral codes under which police prosecuted them.

Travestis' vanguardist politicization of nudity shaped politics in the following decades. In the 2000s travestis became the main protagonists of increasingly massive LGBTTTIQ+ pride demonstrations. By using fantastic disguises as they did at the time of Carnival, and usually showing as much skin as possible, travestis used party and celebration as powerful political tools to challenge the moral limits of public space. Travestis' breast-showing also impacted cisgender feminist groups, who politicized the public showing of the breast in the following decade to challenge male domination of public spaces. In the last two decades, the LGBTTTIQ+ pride parade became a scenario in which trans men showed their chests as a political weapon and a strong claim to visibility.

In summary, from the prison to the streets, travestis politicize their bodies to challenge their exclusion from public spaces. While their presence produced multiple conflicts with different subjects of protest, from the 1980s to the present, they influenced big changes in legislation over public space.

The Transsexual Politicization of “Sex Change”

While in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries travestis placed their bodies at the center of the public scene to push the moralistic limits of democracy and free movement, a new generation of transsexuals transformed “sex change” and gender recognition into a political issue. Transsexual activism utilized mainstream representations of womanhood, such as the value of maternal care or pathological medical narratives usually considered conservative, including gender recognition and gender-affirmation practices, to place them in public debate. In her study on the early suffrage movement, Wendy Rouse uses the concept of “respectability politics” to describe the efforts of cisgender feminist women to distinguish themselves from harmful and disreputable stereotypes by conforming, or at least appearing to conform, to middle-class norms of femininity and domesticity. Rose shows how the main leaders of the movement tried to erase queer behaviors/representation to reduce the backlash against the movement for women’s right to vote.⁷¹ Far from judging transsexual politics as conservative, here I explore the potency and the paradoxes of their politics of respectability in politicizing the right to “sex change” by embodying dominant figures of womanhood. Transsexual women’s political strategies sought to distinguish themselves from travestis. While travestis’ erotic protest culture placed the body at the core of Argentine politics, transsexuals challenged the limits of democracy by embodying respectable public femininity. Transsexuals claimed their right to embody traditional gender roles usually through the “wrong body” narratives that had been present in the Argentine media since the 1950s. They claim the right over their bodies. This process can be analyzed through the trajectories of some of the public faces of this new transsexual movement, such as Karina Urbina and Mariela Muñoz.

According to archival documents, Karina Dora Urbina grew up in a working-class family. She worked in a metal factory for some years, where she got her first document with her female name from the trade union.⁷² Even if this was an important recognition, she was

fired sometime afterward because she was not accepted by the factory supervisors.⁷³ Between 1990 and 1991, Urbina organized at least eight demonstrations. She stood in front of Parliament with the slogan “We are human beings,” and her mother supported her with the slogan “I am proud of my transsexual daughter.”⁷⁴ Urbina was the first Argentine to politicize transsexual identity and gender-reassignment surgery.⁷⁵ In 1992 she went to the courts to request legal recognition of her female gender, and, even though the supreme court rejected her request, Judge Mario Calatayud wrote a minority vote, setting an important precedent for future cases. The supreme court’s rejection attracted the attention of the gay movement. Carlos Jauregui—first president of the CHA and founder of GAYDC—wrote a letter in solidarity endorsing Urbina’s and other transsexuals’ struggle to “do with their bodies what they desire.”⁷⁶ In 1993 Urbina chained herself to the Parliament fence together with Patricia Gauna, one of her comrades, and the police arrested them. Once in jail they demanded to be treated as women.

Transsexuals’ politics of respectability allowed them to attract wide-ranging political support. While they integrated themselves into the lesbian and gay movements, their politics also caused multiple conflicts. As already explained, Urbina founded TRANSDEVI in 1991. The organization gathered together other transsexual activists, such as Ivo Schuster, a trans male political activist, Concepción Gamallo, and the cisgender anthropologist Victoria Barreda, a lecturer at the University of Buenos Aires.⁷⁷ TRANSDEVI organized a pioneering agenda focused on the right to “sex change” (in their own terms). As they described in their magazine *La voz transexual (Transsexual Voice)*, they organized dozens of demonstrations, participated in academic activities, and partook in the emergent lesbian and gay movement.⁷⁸ Beyond getting the support of Jauregui as representative of CHA and then GAYDC, TRANSDEVI got an unprecedented endorsement from the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo and the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, among others. Urbina became the editor of the newspaper *Confidencial*, a political initiative seeking to

coordinate the LGBTTTIQ+ movement's goals. She participated in organizing the first lesbian-gay pride march, which, although it did not include transsexuals and travestis in its name, added the slogan "right to sex change" to its list of demands.⁷⁹



Figure 5.4. Karina Urbina protesting outside Parliament. Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno (Argentina). Departamento de Archivos. Fondo Editorial Sarmiento. Subfondo Crónica. Sección Archivo. Subsección Archivo de redacción. Serie Sobres temáticos. AR00105349.

Transsexuals' identity politics were based in the politicization of the theory of the "wrong body." The use of medical language allowed them to legitimate their claim, while at the same time creating a

moral distinction from travestis, who were usually mocked and hypersexualized in the media. While participating in TV shows, the activist Yanina Moreno—who would later promote laws to allow transsexual gender recognition, as shown below—advocated a moral distinction between travestis and transsexuals. She appropriated the discourse of the “wrong body” to distinguish herself from travestis, saying: “There is confusion. Transsexuals have a dissociation between their psychic and physical sex. A travesti is a man who disguises himself as a woman.”⁸⁰ Even if she did not distinguish herself directly from travestis, Karina Urbina also deployed a politicization of her identity based on a medical language that understood that being transsexual was “an inner feeling that made me see that I was different from other kids. Until I was fifteen, there were no major problems. After that age, I began to transform myself and dress like a woman, preferring trousers for comfort, although I also wear skirts.”⁸¹ Urbina’s political discourse combined elements of the pathological medical narrative with the promise of social justice unfulfilled by Argentina’s democracy. In 1991 she declared:

I am a *transsexual* person—someone who has a discrepancy between her psychological and genital sex. We reinvented the right to sex change and legal registration in Argentina. Some people had surgery here in the 1950s or 1960s and have no legal recognition. The same is true for those who had surgery in Chile or Uruguay. In Chile, sex change has been legal for more than 15 years, even during the Pinochet dictatorship. They say that there is a democracy here. Why am I not authorized here? Why am I not respected? I didn’t have surgery because I can’t afford it. I can’t go to another country.”⁸²

Along these same lines, Karina also wrote, “There is a woman inside my body,”⁸³ adding, “We have always existed, but once we had achieved sufficient technology, we were able to solve our problem. A *transsexual* who has not had surgery is not a travesti. Their desire to change sex is latent, and the essential change, which is psychological, is latent.”⁸⁴

Urbina’s transsexual definition converged with some feminist perspectives, such as that of Maria Oddone, a central figure in Argentine feminism since 1970, founder of the Movimiento de

Liberación Femenina (Movement for Women's Liberation). Oddone defined transsexuality as "a tragic problem for people who have it, because a society with rigid roles rejects those who don't reproduce them." Oddone described Urbina in classical female terms, as a "beautiful girl with a sweet and feminine way of expressing herself," adding, "She is not a homosexual, she is a woman who wishes to have a body according to her psychic sex, which is the feminine."⁸⁵ This affirmation was paradoxical. While it affirmed traditional values assigned to womanhood, it also contradicted the resistance of some feminists to the inclusion of transsexuals in the feminist agenda.

Karina's discourse interacted with ongoing processes: debates about the global challenges of democracy and the progressively stronger references to individual rights, including over one's body as a personal asset. If the neoliberal reforms led by Carlos Menem, characterized by market deregulation, were based on the promise of access to goods for those able to pay it, Urbina pointed out the contradictions of public restrictions over the transsexual desire to physically affirm their gender. She performed sex change in a political way by defining the state banning of gender-affirmation treatments as metaphors of an unfulfilled democracy. As travestis did, Urbina reinvented the language of human rights movements to challenge the state authoritarian restriction over gender-affirmation practices. For example, she used the concept of exile to portray herself in the same way as victims of political violence by stating: "Many of us are in exile in Europe, tired of the persecution we suffered under the dictatorship. We are not allowed to move freely. We demand our right to be different."⁸⁶ While the right to be different struggled against the heritage of an authoritarian order, it also converged with the neoliberal promise of individual freedom promoted by the government and the media. However, the conservatism of the political representatives of these models refused to recognize transsexual rights.

The path of other activists highlights the paradoxes of transsexual politics. While their activism usually reinforced traditional notions associated with womanhood, these uses of key cultural symbols

displaced the imagined margins for transsexuals. The best example is Mariela Muñoz, who emerged as a leading national figure in her struggle to recover the custody of three of her children that a judge had previously annulled in 1993. She became the first transsexual woman in Argentina legally recognized as a woman, under a court order in 1997.⁸⁷

As I have previously reconstructed with Johana Kunin, Muñoz was born in 1943. She grew up in a poor, rural, working-class family that moved from Tucuman to Buenos Aires. In 1958 she renamed herself Mariela. In 1981 she traveled to Chile to have gender-affirmation treatment. Although she later discovered it did not have legal value in her home country, she forged her ID and got married to a man. To achieve her desire to become a mother, she made an arrangement with two poor women who were pregnant, promised them that if they did not have abortions, she would take care of raising their children. In 1993 the biological mother of one child accused her of abduction and document forgery. Judge Pedro Entío ordered the imprisonment of Muñoz and her husband and took the children away from them. She started a long struggle, with which she reached international recognition. For example, she participated in the International Tribunal on Human Rights Violations Against Sexual Minorities, in New York in 1993. Although Muñoz won social popularity, she could never regain custody of the children.⁸⁸

Muñoz performed motherhood as a synonym of womanhood. She referred to caretaking as an innate duty of women throughout her life. She often repeated, “My children are my best lawyers.”⁸⁹ It is difficult to find evidence that Muñoz was considered a bad mother. A police report states that “Muñoz raised the children excellently, and there is much proof that the couple loved them.”⁹⁰ This social approval was due to the confluence between parenting practices related to education and moral norms: her children were straight, employed, working-class people and later had their own families that helped to legitimize her motherhood. While Muñoz was pushing motherhood beyond biology, she was at the same time affirming its conservative dimensions.

Moreover, Muñoz obscured her sexuality to embody the social expectations of motherhood. She repeated in interviews, “When I had to choose between my children and a man, I chose my children,” as a mechanism to distinguish herself from the media sexualization of the bodies of travestis and transsexuals, characters that were usually used as interchangeable concepts in the media.⁹¹ In contrast with the exultant figures of the travesti, Muñoz’s modest clothes erased the eroticism from her body by covering her breasts and legs in a way that converged with what the public expected from a mother. This distinction allowed her to break down the narratives that mocked transsexuals and create an image far removed from sex work and police stations. Muñoz challenged the press for calling her a “travesti mother” and accusing her of being involved in international traffic in children. She stated: “The media did not fool the Argentinean public. I received empathy from everyone. I became the symbol of Argentinean motherhood.”⁹²

Muñoz’s immaculate body resonated with cultural icons, such as the Virgin of Lujan, a key icon of Argentine nationhood that attracts crowds of worshippers. She also linked herself with other maternal figures with no history of biological reproduction, such as Eva Peron, whose rhetoric had elevated her as the mother of workers and those in need. Muñoz refused to reduce her life to her sexuality: she embodied the figure of the mother as a nonsexual subject. When asked by journalists about her life before her gender-affirmation surgery, she defined herself as a virgin: “I did not know how I could have pleasure. I had never had sex before. My husband was my first man.”⁹³ Muñoz’s use of the idea of her virginal body constituted a reappropriation of the possibility of mothering without a sexual encounter, which is at the heart of the Catholic tradition.

Furthermore, she distinguished herself from the biological mothers of her children by emphasizing her maternal desire and their lack. Her public explanations about the arrangement with the birth mothers stressed that she had helped them avoid having abortions.⁹⁴ In Argentina abortion was banned until 2020.⁹⁵ Several testimonies show how people considered Muñoz’s parenting a better

option than abortion, as one of her neighbors declared, “I questioned myself if it was better to have these children aborted before birth or to have Mariela raise them.”⁹⁶ Even if Muñoz never expressed herself to be against abortion, her engagement of the dominant social position helped her achieve popular support. In 1993 a journalist noticed that even though some priests spoke in public against Muñoz, many Catholics positively valued her duty as a mother.⁹⁷ By performing the role of the “good mother,” Muñoz created a strong identification with a broader audience; however, this performance was supported by an unwitting though effective demonization of her children’s biological mothers, who were portrayed as “bad mothers,” and by her role in helping avoid abortions.

Muñoz’s model of motherhood created tensions with part of the feminist, lesbian, and gay movements. On the one hand, her case was at odds with the denaturalization of women’s role as caregivers, as promoted by lesbian and feminist movements. On the other hand, her story was closer to the gay movement’s familiar rhetoric in its quest for the recognition of civil unions. In one way or another, and in contrast to the traditional press, lesbian, gay, and feminist publications gave minimal visibility to Muñoz’s struggle. Rafael Fredda, the leader of the gay organization SIGLA and ex-president of the CHA, highlighted that some of the leaders felt uncomfortable with her discourse and insisted that she change it.⁹⁸ As we quote in the article I wrote with Johana Kunin, María Luisa Peralta, who had participated in *Lesbianas a la Vista* (Visible Lesbians) since 1996, remembers: “In the 1990s, motherhood was not a popular topic among feminist groups. Lesbian organizations had an agenda for those who had sons and daughters from their previous straight marriages; they were at risk of losing their children for being lesbians. But the topic of lesbian motherhood did not emerge until the end of the decade.”⁹⁹

While transsexual women activists politicized their right to sex change by embodying mainstream narratives of womanhood, in the same period during the 1990s, male trans, transgender, and transsexual activists started on the long path toward their greater

visibility. In the late 1990s, the magazine *Las Iguanas* from Córdoba became a political platform for male transgender political visibility. Founded by transgender, lesbian, and bisexual activists such as the intersex and trans activist Mauro Cabral Grinspan, the magazine became a platform for circulating first-person narratives about the transgender experience. In their first issue, the editors stated that they were criticizing the myth that “only men can be transgender (feeling as women)” and promoted the voices of those who “are men living in the wrong body.”¹⁰⁰ The magazine translated the debates of global male transgender activism. It also valued trans masculine visibility by enacting it in the context of a living possibility.¹⁰¹ According to Andres Mendieta and Francisco Fernández, this magazine was one of the first to introduce terms such as “*transgénero*” and “*trans*” in Argentina.¹⁰² In the following decades, especially during the 2010s, trans male activists played a leading role in promoting rights for body autonomy, such as expanding the notion of those subjects as part of the fight for legal abortion in Argentina, which had previously been restricted to cisgender women.¹⁰³

The increasing politicization of sex change transformed the courts into a scene of struggle. During the 1980s and 1990s, the number of legal applications for gender recognition multiplied. Activists took advantage of the Latin American constitutional reforms of the 1990s, which usually included antidiscrimination articles to challenge the legal order in the courts. They demanded that the state establish a concordance between their social and legal identities and, in some cases, to approve gender-affirmation treatments.¹⁰⁴

Mónica Petracci and Mario Pecheny have edited a summary of these fights in the courts. In 1989 the National Civil Chamber rejected the request of a person who had undergone an operation abroad and asked for a correction of his birth certificate and documents (trial decision, March 31, 1989). In this case, the judges decided to give priority to “genetic sex,” arguing that for them, sex was immutable. However, the minority vote of the judge, Dr. Calatayud, in which he recognized that once a person embarked on

the path to surgery, the state should consider social integration, would set a new precedent for future court injunctions. In 1993 the National Court of First Instance No. 18 granted a request to change the name and rectify the birth certificate of an intersex person and therefore ordered the rectification of the documents with the support of the Forensic Medical Corps (trial decision, March 5, 1993). Something similar happened the following year, but this time the authorization included performing a surgical operation (trial decision of November 11, 1994). This ruling had Dr. Maggi's vote, which, for the first time, recognized that "sex" was not genetic but responded to multiple biological, psychological, and social factors.¹⁰⁵

Mariela Muñoz was the first transsexual woman to obtain a civil sex change through the resolution granted to her in 1997 by the Civil and Commercial Court of First Instance No. 8 of Quilmes, which ordered the rectification of her birth certificate. In 2001 the Collegiate Tribunal of the First Instance, Family Code No. 1 in Quilmes gave an appeal to a transsexual man who had undergone gender-affirmation treatment in Chile, allowing him to modify his documents.¹⁰⁶ In 2001 Judge Pedro F. Hooft of Mar del Plata No. 1 authorized someone to have female gender-affirmation surgery. He also approved rectification of the data recorded in the birth certificate, identity card, and school transcripts, declaring that they belonged to the female sex and, consequently, replacing their first names (July 19, 2001). Several judges acted following the consolidated discourse of the international human rights system, particularly the San José de Costa Pact, which prohibits unequal treatment before the law and mandates the care of citizens' physical and psychological integrity.¹⁰⁷

The politicization of sex change also entered Parliament. The Peronist parliamentarian Gustavo Green presented the first gender recognition bill in 1995, entitled Regime for Physical Adaptation and Change of Civil Identity for Cases of Intersex and Transsexuality. The representant was advised by activist Yanina Moreno of TRANSAR (Transexuales Argentinas). The proposed law established that anyone over eighteen years old could access legal gender-affirmation

treatments under medical advice. Immigrants had to have a minimum of five years of residence. After that treatment and with legal authorization, they could request new documents according to their gender.¹⁰⁸ The project faced significant opposition from Catholic and profamily organizations that claimed that people “could not choose their sex.” In 2001 Alfredo Bravo of Frente País Solidario (National Solidarity Front, FREPASO) presented the bill Personal Rights to Sexual Rectification for Transsexuals, Hermaphrodites, or Pseudohermaphrodites. In 2002 the parliamentarian Roberto Saredi of the Partido Justicialista (Peronist) presented the bill Personal Rights to Sexual Rectification in the Registry. In 2003 the socialist María José Lubertino presented the bill Change of Name and Sexual Adaptation in Case of Change of Sex or Discordance with Gender Identity or Expression. In 2007 the Socialist Silvia Augsburger presented the bill Gender Identity Law (different from the one passed in 2012). Although the Parliament did not decide to discuss these bills, the first bills included references to international legislation, such as that in France, that said that those interested in modifying their gender should be diagnosed with “Gender Identity Disorder.”

While some activists occupied Parliament, courts, and the streets, others brought the discussion to the media. The popularity of dancer and actress Cris Miró (1965-99) in 1990 radically transformed trans representation.¹⁰⁹ Born in 1965 into a conservative family, the daughter of a retired military father, Cris Miró embodied the daily struggle for a body of her own. Dressing in secret to attend dance clubs, where she soon became a prominent figure, she leapt into the public eye in 1995 when Mirtha Legrand—an icon of conservative Argentine culture who hosts a lunchtime TV show in which she invites guests to share the table with her in what seems to be a very expensive house—declared: “At this moment is there no sexier, cuter, and more sensual vedette than Cris Miró out there?”¹¹⁰ It took some time for Miró to be welcomed among travestis working in the streets, because some of them considered her to benefit from class privileges.

Similar to the Coccinelle effect, Miró represented through an exuberant female embodiment a nexus between male sexual fantasy and the popular travesti and transsexual body. She participated in the films *Dios los cría* (Fernando Ayala) and *La peste* (Luis Puenzo), but her stardom came from variety theater and television. Miró displayed an unprecedented feminine sensuality with which she challenged cisgendered frontiers to access the star system. She quickly became an icon who politicized trans bodies. By negotiating with journalists who repeatedly asked her about her genitals, she embodied the pride and complexity of being trans (sometimes using the term *travesti* and other times *transsexual*). After questions in which the conservative TV host insisted on knowing her “real sex,” Mirtha Legrand asked her, “What is your real name? Do you want to say it or not?” She replied, “My real name is the one I feel, and it is Cris Miró.”¹¹¹ This was a daily struggle with which several activists tried to reaffirm on television their right to be called by their social name and not be reduced to the name chosen by their parents. Miró deployed an aesthetic politics that consisted of valorizing trans bodies by placing herself as a subject of male desire.

Just as Evita’s fashion politics had tended to reaffirm the right of working-class women to consumption and social mobility beyond their social origins, Miró’s female performance expanded the horizons of trans representation. That the gossip shows paired her with the football player Diego Armando Maradona, a central icon of Argentine culture, reinforced her place as a significant female figure of popular culture. Along with Evita, her presence was disturbing for conservatives. Her performances on TV embodied the democratization of the fantasy of a possible future in which travestis and transsexuals could represent the female beauty standard. Luis Patti, a former military officer who revolted against the democratic government of Raúl Alfonsín and a far-right parliamentary candidate, often attacked Miró: “Cris Miró is not a transsexual but a homosexual: he is a man who adopts the form of a woman. And I don’t think this is a condition whose rights should be recognized.”¹¹² Cris Miró died during the peak of the HIV/AIDs epidemic in 1999.

Shortly after her death, many travestis and transsexuals adopted her as an icon of trans culture.

Converging Agendas: The Gender Identity Law of 2012

The twenty-first century became a scenario for the consolidation of LGBTTTIQ+ civil rights in Latin America. Center-left governments established alliances with social movements and made constitutional reforms, and the consolidation of the international discourse of human rights allowed more profound claims in the terrain of sexuality. In Argentina, during the leadership of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, equal marriage was approved in 2010, the Gender Identity Law was passed in 2012, and a law promoting trans employment was passed in 2021. Despite a fierce struggle with the Catholic and evangelical churches, social movements achieved an unprecedented expansion in the legal and social fields. As Constanza Tabbush has pointed out, LGBTTTIQ+ movements successfully pushed their agenda despite moments of conflict between progressive administrations and the Church to consolidate their rights.¹¹³

During those years activists formed organizations with local, national, and global scope. While during the 1990s travestis and transsexuals deployed their agendas in dialogue but also in conflict, the new century opened space for coalitions. After the pioneer activism of Ivo Schuster, trans men's organizations grew and participated in formulating the right to a body of their own. According to Francisco Romero and Andres Mendieta, trans men organizations flourished in the twenty-first century. Some examples of this are the group of trans and intersex men Teatro de Operaciones (Operating Theaters) created by Mauro Cabral and Joaquín Ibarburu in 2006; in 2009 Trans male activists from the ATTTA (Argentine Travesti, Transgender, and Transsexual Association) founded their own male branch; in 2010 the group Argentine Trans Men was founded; and in 2011, Kalym Adrian Sosa created the Intersex, Transvesti, and Transgender Network of

Argentina (RITTA).¹¹⁴ Activists such as Mauro Cabral Grinspan had a significant impact on local and global contexts. Along with his participation with many other trans men in the fight for the passing of the Gender Identity Law, he pursued advocacy with global outreach. For example, in 2007 he was one of the first signatories to the Yogyakarta Principles, a series of statements encouraging the inclusion of the right to gender identity drafted in the international human rights system. Also, in 2009, he founded GATE, an organization that played an important role in the decision of the World Health Organization to remove trans identities from the list of mental and behavioral disorders.¹¹⁵ Trans male activists had a crucial role in defining the feminist and LGBTTTIQ+ agenda. Francisco Fernández Romero analyzes how, during the struggle for abortion legalization, trans men challenged both the discursive limitation of abortion to a female body and their exclusion from the policymaking process. After decades of building visibility, they changed the proposed law so that it extended the right to everybody with the capability to conceive, which transformed basic notions of gendered policies.

Romero highlights how trans men's grassroots activism for reproductive justice was part of a broader fight to be recognized as political actors by other social movements and the state.¹¹⁶ A good example of this was the public interventions of the philosopher and trans activist Blas Radi, who participated as a speaker in parliamentary debates about the legalization of the interruption of pregnancy. He coined the term "reproductive status quo" to define how both cisgender feminists and anti-abortion activists reduce the debate to being about cisgender women's bodies. In his interventions, he pointed out the need for trans men and nonbinary people to not only be included in the discursive dimension of the law but also to be involved in the policymaking process.¹¹⁷

The agenda for free public circulation and rights over one's body converged, because social exclusion was articulated over people's bodies. The cisgender limits of democracy were experienced through the state dispossession of people's sovereignty over the body, and

social and civil violence were archived through it. The critical body discourses analyzed in [chapter 4](#) converged in a new agenda. The fight for legal identity recognition and healthcare articulated a broader program that included the material conditions of being. In 2010 multiple activists and organizations created the National Front for the Gender Identity Law. Different activists developed a powerful agenda to concretize an unprecedented set of rights, which Parliament passed in May 2012.¹¹⁸ The Gender Identity Law was the first in the world to legislate people's inviolable right to gender self-determination and, among other things, forced the public and private healthcare systems to provide free access to gender-affirmation practices. The travesti, transgender, and transsexual movements connected the law's genealogy to organizations from the human rights struggle, such as the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Their battle to recognize children stolen from disappeared people during the dictatorship constructed a powerful symbol in local political culture, one that valued the right to their own identity.

The law reflected the Yogyakarta Principles, a document about human rights concerning the areas of sexual orientation and gender identity. The report sets out principles on the application of international human rights law concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. The activist Mauro Cabral Grinspan participated in the making of the document. One of its principles is the right to recognition:

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law. Persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities shall enjoy legal capacity in all aspects of life. Each person's self-defined sexual orientation and gender identity is integral to their personality and is one of the most basic aspects of self-determination, dignity, and freedom. No one shall be forced to undergo medical procedures, including sex reassignment surgery, sterilization, or hormonal therapy, as a requirement for legal recognition of their gender identity. No status, such as marriage or parenthood, may be invoked as such to prevent the legal recognition of a person's gender identity. No one shall be subjected to pressure to conceal, suppress, or deny their sexual orientation or gender identity.¹¹⁹

María Belén Correa from TMA defined the Gender Identity Law as a turning point: “Democracy came to us in 2012.” If violence was an everyday embodied experience, recognizing self-perceived gender was an opportunity, a platform to redefine the role of trans people in society. However, as several studies have recently shown, extreme social exclusion and social violence are commonplace to trans experiences. Lohana Berkins frequently said that “people embody gender identity, it is not in the air,” in order to emphasize that legal recognition did not erase trans material precariousness.¹²⁰ Though legal rights appropriated in daily life can be a factor of social transformation; as Isha Scribano—the holder of changed ID number 9,000—said, they struggled to recover the right to smile.¹²¹

* * *

Between 2012 and 2020, nine thousand people applied to change their identity documents. Most of the applicants live in Buenos Aires. Most of those who applied for this change were between the ages of 20 and 29 (43 percent), followed by 30 to 39 (24 percent), 40 and 49 (14 percent), 50 to 59 (4 percent), and finally, those 60 and over (1 percent).¹²² These age disparities have multiple explanations. Violent state policies against the trans community pushed many older people into exile (in both dictatorial and democratic times). Among those who remained in Argentina, many were killed by police agents or civilians; others were victims of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, medical malpractice, or extreme economic and social exclusion. Furthermore, the need for documents was not something felt by all. Some trans people preferred not to change their documents because they did not feel identified as either men or women. Likewise, some chose not to change their IDs because there are forms of broader social citizenship. Others managed to integrate into their communities without legal validation or simply survived on the margins.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to neglect the crucial transformation developed by the Gender Identity Law, which created a new scenario of paradoxes. On the one hand, the law challenged some of the classic mechanisms of the production of “sex” in modern

states. In contrast to the legal regimes of other countries, people do not require medical advice to change their documents. By placing everyone's right for gender self-determination at the core of the Argentine law, this legislation created new paradoxes that overflowed the binary conceptions of sex. Some travestis and the more recently formed nonbinary movement have raised fears about the potential dissolution of their identities into the category of male or female. Recently, the activist Lara Bertolini has even demanded that the justice system take the principle of recognition of the law further by requesting that her self-perceived gender be recognized as that of a travesti. Similar initiatives have been promoted by other activists, as well as some parliamentarians, who have raised the possibility of removing civil sex from registration documents.¹²³ On July 21, 2021, Argentina began to make available nonbinary personal documents, breaking a binary legal tradition.

Berkins theorized how the Gender Identity Law underscored the legal artificiality of sex and how trans people should use the agency it gave to build citizenship:

Before this law, the State said “Lohana Berkins, man” even though I have never lived by that standard. I am a travesti, and I will remain the same. Why should I change my story to satisfy a norm? I want to point out two things: one, that in concrete and legal terms, for example, when I make a purchase in a shop, and I have to present a document, I’m not going to have to argue about who I am. In any case, the document expresses who you want to be: it will say that you are such a person, and that will fit into the fiction of the legal game. Because the construction of my identity has to do with other things: my history is not going to be erased from the new document. But at least in everyday life, I won’t have to go around explaining. I won’t have to be constantly negotiating my identity to buy a pair of panties with a debit card. The other question is how identity is constructed independently of the document. Because if we had not obtained the law, would we have disappeared?¹²⁴

Sex has been a bodily and legal logic at the heart of the rights system in Argentina. As a deprivational tool—when, for example, the state restricted the vote to men—or as a principle of legal protection—such as retirement age—sex has been both a stumbling block and a

reference category for the formulation of gendered rights discourses. We do not know the future of “sex” as a category that produces a social relationship. The Gender Identity Law provides a legislative basis that, far from restricting, promotes new experiences of recognition. Its principle of gender self-perception creates the possibility of new definitions in the future. It opens space for identification that in turn invites new possible futures.

This chapter shows the long process of body politicization with which travestis and transsexuals have struggled against state policing of their bodies. From nonorganized practices to social mobilization, travesti and transsexual movements called for an open battle for the sovereignty of each person over their own body. The road to the Gender Identity Law was also a final ongoing battle for the centrality of the body in nation building and citizenship, on the frontiers of public power. Even if not intended by activists, placing their precarious bodies into the public discussion was part of a broader battle defining the limits of people’s sovereignty over their bodies—which facilitated the creation of coalitions, strategies, and an eventual consensus for the legalization of abortion in 2020.¹²⁵ This chapter illuminates the multiple ways in which trans people’s politicization of their bodies reshaped the moral limits of citizenship. Whether portraying themselves as erotic subjects who transgressed the limits of androcentric political imagination, or by embodying traditional aspects of womanhood, trans activists undermined state sovereignty over every person’s body.

Epilogue

On June 25, 2021, the Casa Rosada—the Pink House of Argentina’s central government—was illuminated with the colors of the trans pride flag (light blue, pink, and white). This initiative on the part of the government celebrated the fact that the Senate had passed a law that promotes the employment of travestis and transgender and transsexual people by establishing a minimum quota in the public service and tax relief for the private sector. The Parliament named the law after Diana Sacayán and Lohana Berkins, two leaders of the travesti movement who understood that their struggle was beyond identity recognition and had fought to transform their material living conditions. Berkins and Sacayán reinvented a long history of LGBTTTIQ+ class struggle, from the radical incursions into Peronism in the 1970s to the antidiscrimination campaigns of the 1980s. They organized work cooperatives to create jobs for the trans community beyond sex work and linked identity with broader rights, such as healthcare. They formulated a political agenda to challenge travestis’ precarious present and enable new futures.

Sacayán was one of the first promoters of the quota for trans employment. She was born in Tucuman in 1975. Like other travestis, she moved from northern Argentina to the Buenos Aires metropolitan area. She lived in regions affected by extreme inequality and poverty, and also spent part of her life behind bars. Driven by the experience of social exclusion, she enrolled in the Communist Party at a young age. She organized social programs for the inclusion of travestis, Indigenous people, and the prison population, founded grassroots organizations and cooperatives, and was a Communist candidate in La Matanza—the biggest urban space in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, characterized by high poverty rates.

As the result of Sacayán’s insistence in Parliament, the Buenos Aires provincial government approved the first law to promote trans

employment in 2015. However, for four years of the conservative administration of governor María Eugenia Vidal, the law was not advanced. In the following years, different local governments around the country passed similar legislation. However, Sacayán did not live to see the achievement of her activism. On October 11, 2015, a man murdered her. She was thirty-nine years old. The case prompted a national debate. Diana was well known for her human rights activism, she was close to several members of Parliament and even shared space at the front of political rallies with former president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner. But beyond her political activism, she was as vulnerable to patriarchal violence as other travestis. On June 18, 2018, the Criminal Court (no. 4) of Buenos Aires City sentenced her murderer for a hate crime based on Diana's travesti identity. This unprecedented decision integrated activists' term *travesticidio* (travesticide) into the legal language as the name given to a crime motivated by the hatred of travesti identity.

Even if the coexistence of both the images of the crime against Sacayán (and many others that don't even get to a trial) and the illuminated government palace seems contradictory, it shows the multiple temporalities of trans history, especially the distance between the law and the lived experience of being a citizen. In fact, the image of the government palace covered in the trans flag is alluring. The symbolic weight of those colors over the center of public power seems to contrast with the history of a state that has promoted the very material conditions that reduced trans life expectancy (and that still do.) On one level, the illumination of the flag on the official building is an attempt to recognize the state's role in trans extermination and underscore an alleged turning point in Argentine trans politics. The image appears to revert the state's power. It is not state authority projected over trans bodies; in contrast, the trans colors are projected from below onto the body of public power. However, at the same time, the celebration of the flag creates a dangerous teleological narrative that goes from exclusion to an infinite expansion of rights, denying the fact that trans horizons in Argentina are still precarious and that the translation from law to daily reality is still far from an accomplished fact.

As Sacayán's murder demonstrates, the shining lights are not the end point. While the trans movement transformed Argentina into a vanguard of the global trans agenda, trans life still faces extreme precariousness. Over the past few years, several men have murdered trans women and men in hate crimes. Even though it is illegal, police violence continues, primarily affecting those selling sex in the street. Although the Gender Identity Law forces public and private healthcare systems to offer gender-affirmation treatments, the lack of human and material resources threatens this right. Physicians' training on trans health is still deficient, an omission that makes it challenging to guarantee their patients' requests and facilitates the reproduction of transphobic practices. The provincial nature of the public healthcare administration also creates a complex map in which trans people usually move from one province to another or have to struggle to make this right a real one. In January 2022 the police imprisoned a surgical-instrument maker who practiced outlawed surgeries without proper hygiene on trans clients in the south of the city of Buenos Aires.¹ There is a big step between legislation and the living experience of social exclusion. For example, a report by the Union of Public Employees showed that in 2022, the Argentine state was far from completing the 1 percent established for the public employment of the trans population in the civil service. At this rate, it would take eighteen years to complete it.² Far from ending such situations, the law is only an instrument that can reinforce building citizenship from below, far from eradicating the material conditions that make certain trans lives precarious.

This book shows that teleological storytelling about rights and technologies has failed by assuming that even with legal rights, the limits of the state create space for formal and informal circuits of gender embodiment practices. Alba Rueda, former national secretary of politics of diversity (2019–22) and envoy of gender and sexual orientation (2022–23) from the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the first openly trans person to hold a high-ranking position in the national government, told me about the material challenges of trans policy. During the coronavirus pandemic peak of 2020–21, she

found that several social service organizations in the country never interacted with trans people, never gave them any access to broader social programs. As she summarizes, “Our community is not isolated from the state. I would say that is the state that is still isolated from its citizens.”³

Lohana Berkins understood legal rights to be only one aspect of the trans struggle. Trans people needed to appropriate the law in order to practice citizenship. While writing about the nature of the Gender Identity Law and the fact that until 2021 the law only made it possible to identify in the binary male and female, which did not include her travesti identity, Berkins promoted an instrumental use of state terminology. As she told a journalist shortly after the 2021 law’s passage:

Although we have always been quite adept at breaking down the boundaries between us and the rest of society, there are still many people who are unaware of our issues. I am talking about little things that sum up the impact of the Gender Identity Law. For example, when I went to the supermarket, I was asked for my ID card every time I bought something with my debit card. When the cashier saw it, he found a photo that did not match what was in front of him. I don’t need to explain my looks. Today, I can go to the supermarket, and when I want to take out my ID card, if they tell me “No need,” I take it out anyway.⁴

The law was a tool of daily struggle, a powerful weapon, with which travestis could build bonds between the trans community, the state, and civil society. In fact, the potency of Berkins’s theory—as well as the body of knowledge that trans activists such as Alba Rueda and Marlene Wayar define as Latin American travesti theory—relies on its materiality.⁵ It is not a theory worried only about the liberal dimension of social rights. In contrast, it places the material conditions of existence at the core of political thinking. There is no right to the body without considering the condition of those bodies, the articulation of broader rights, such as work, housing, and free movement.

This book does not address *rights* as a strict legal term. It is not primarily a history of trans activism and its legal achievements. Instead, this monograph is a history of the social modulation of the

nation, state, sex, and citizenship through the body as a conflictive territory for individual and collective imaginaries of the future and a place of formation of material conditions of being. But even more, it is a history of a more expansive repertoire of technologies and practices with which people affirmed their gender and, by doing so, reinvented social belonging. This monograph offers methodological, theoretical, and historical insights about the everyday details with which people struggle to achieve full sovereignty over their bodies, with the conviction that this is not done in a vacuum. This work crosses families, friendship, and pleasure. It notes how from the everyday agency of social belonging to a community in their terms and with political actions, trans people struggled to change society. From the delicate knitting of dresses to self-injected testosterone, this book addresses the multiple ways with which people made a body of one's own.

Bodies and Laboratories

Raúl Luis Suárez lived a thriving public male life for at least eighteen years. As I explain in [chapter 1](#), he migrated from Spain to Montevideo and then Buenos Aires, where he was able to forge his documents for being recognized as a legal man. Raúl got married and had a good job in the customs office. His mysterious death transformed his body into a document and a laboratory. Journalists promoted gossip and transformed his life into a spectacle for the audience's entertainment. The authorities quickly accused his partner, Matilde, of being a killer by poisoning, a common fear in South American metropolises during those years.⁶ Doctors dissected Raúl's body. They removed his clothes, brain, and organs. They inspected his perforated ears and inquired about his body in order to build a broader knowledge about sex. They destroyed his body and his legacy to define the limits of the gendered body, to follow the traces of what sex was and which were their potential deviations.

Like many others, Raúl became a public laboratory in which scientists and public figures affirmed their ideas about sex. His body was a stage and an actor in a conflictual encounter between multiple

agents. From physicians to feminists, these agents asked themselves how he dealt with becoming a customs officer and got married, articulating anxiety about the technologies and practices with which he embodied masculinity. Somehow, even being manipulated by the doctor's hand, his body resisted this new prescription. Photographs and stories of Raúl continue to remember who he was and how he was recognized by his fellows.



Figure 6.1. Raúl's grave. *Última hora*, April 30, 1930.

When journalists and doctors finished with Raúl's body, they reburied him. Raúl's traces, his photographs, and the articles about him began a different journey of (dis)embodiment. The archivists in the newsroom of *Caras y caretas* first, and later those in the General Archive of the Nation, placed him in the category of "Female figures."

Many decades later, some journalists writing about transsexuality resignified Raúl's story. Against his will, they published his old photographs in a dress to emphasize the alleged artificiality of his sex. They made a pact with their readers: they were living a genuinely sexed experience that contrasted with Raúl's alleged fictionality. However, Raúl's agency extended beyond death through the love he built with his partner. As the picture shows, his partner allowed Raúl to be buried with male underwear and under his real name, respecting his desire. In this same direction, as I discuss in [chapter 1](#), this book builds a narrative that works against the monopoly of journalists and archivists who tried to reduce Raúl's afterlives to his genitalia. This reparatory writing brings him to life to create a counternarrative of those photographs by pondering those images and practices with which Raúl—and many others of his contemporaries crossing the frontiers of what was understood as gender in their time—affirmed himself in his own gendered terms.

While sex change was a medical and popular category formalized in the postwar world, the idea that people could be changing from one “sex” to “another” concerned sexual discourses dating back at least to the late nineteenth century. Some biologists were obsessed with the zoological and botanical, others with those bodies that did not fit in their image of a woman or a man. This book shows that the struggle for defining this possibility was a struggle within the body. It is impossible to know what doctors were attempting to find in Raúl's brain. Even if they knew there was nothing strange in his gray matter, doctors transformed his body into a space of experimentation and struggled to define the limits of sex by showing its artificiality.

This monograph explores sex medicalization as a space of conflict. Far from considering Raúl's body as a passive object of science, I prefer to think of the powerful fact that even in the most unequal conditions, narratives of Raúl's life could work also as challenges to medical monolithic discourse. Argentine doctors, policy makers, journalists, trans people, and social movements battled to define the popular, medical, cultural, and legal notion of sex. From media narratives about travesti vedettes' hair removal to court decisions,

every element played its role in the making of coexistent and conflictive notions of sex.

This book shows that sex was a central notion in twentieth-century Argentine state- and nation-building. In this sense the book pays attention to the making of sex as a bodily experience more than a mainly discursive reality. It reconstructs how people embodied the potency and restriction of this category. Sex was more than a legal category that limited social, civil, or political rights. It was an embodied experience that could lead to normative or even nonbinary corporealities, a cultural sense that articulated embodiment practices that ranged from clothing and self-injected silicone to violent police action against gender affirmation, such as compulsory haircuts.

Sex contained visions of the future. Because of mainstream representations of Argentina as an empty country that should be populated, regulating sex (and its possible changes) became a central space in which to shape the future. Doctors, judges, and policy makers deployed mechanisms to erase people from their bodies. Policing played a crucial role in building authoritarian social orders. This book shows how even in its more liberal expressions, the agents of the Argentine state's obsession with limiting deviation were part of broader projects of social orders that interconnected gender, class, and race. Police power controlled transgressive embodiment practices, such as clothing from 1933 and biomedical treatments from 1944, and the ensuing domain of this legislation until the twenty-first century shows how regulating embodiment became central to the making of modern Argentina. Likewise, the continuity of these restrictions across civil and military governments challenges the standard interpretation of political regimes by showing the limits of liberal democracy to extend people's rights over their bodies.

The obsession with body policing speaks to the historical fragility of cisgendered embodiment. Because of the porous nature of these technological repertoires, and the multilateral circulation of hormones and clothing in trans and cisgender body construction, regulation was a way to limit proper uses. This was a regulation with which elites tried to impose an allegedly natural effect over a supposedly artificial one.

Likewise, medicalization was not a vertical process. Far from restricting embodiment technologies to doctors and their offices, people experimented with their own bodies to challenge social, medical, cultural, and political restrictions to their gender affirmations. While doctors, policy makers, and judges tried to monopolize experimentation over bodies, some people's desire to affirm their gender, and the increasing news about people doing so, created scenarios of self-experimentation, knowledge, and technological production. This book shows that gender affirmation during the twentieth century expanded our notions of body technology. By performing themselves in living laboratories, trans people combined broader social repertoires of affirmation. Silicone, hormones, forged documents, trousers, and posing, among many other things, interacted in lives that moved through geographies and categories. This monograph values the autonomous production of knowledge, practices, and objects as a challenge to medical and state control, and also as an effect of state despotism. It recognizes other spaces of transnational circulation with which people, guided by different logics, build sovereignty over their bodies. Likewise, it also points to how these people were forced to employ risky experimentation that sometimes ended their lives.

This experimentation also challenged temporalities attached to the notion of technology. Looked at from a distance, narratives of Argentine body construction challenge teleological narratives in which biotechnologies displaced prosthetic mechanisms. The sometimes erratic temporality that guides this book is a symptom of the multiple lives of these technologies, many of which trans people still use. Embodiment practices have had multiple geographical, social, and generational circuits, and these make sense in their contexts. Moreover, the stories told in this book show that technology is a bodily experience. This challenges the perspective that reduces objects to their functionality to understand the social and emotional power that wearing a sexy dress that shows off skin or a good pair of trousers could have over time.

Calling attention to bodily transitions and related discourses challenges historical narratives attached to identity development.

This monograph offers a significant contribution to queer history by calling attention to how a vector—for example, the idea of people changing sex—could act as an axis to bring people with diverse identity logics to the same historical narrative. The book discourages those studies based on an evolutive identity narration. It invites readers to shift focus from the possibility of moving from one socially recognized gender to another, to the materials and mechanisms of these embodiments.

This monograph also contributes to the rethinking of broader notions of citizenship and belonging. Placing embodiment technologies in their social contexts is an attempt to understand the politics of belonging beyond state recognition. The lives of those who, like Raúl, lived in society as men help us understand the social technologies of masculine belonging. The articulation of attitudes, posing, clothing, or biotechnologies created a sometimes ephemeral social citizenship.

A Body of One's Own also calls attention to transsexual, travesti, and transgender critical approaches to medicalized gender-affirmation practices. By addressing critical discourses about the dangerous side effects of some homemade practices and the dominant roles of embodiment, this book values the production of robust activist speech that deployed possible alternative embodiments and recognized the beauty of trans bodies. Likewise, this political action was central to the progressive challenge of the authoritarian sexual order and its legislation. The passage of the Gender Identity Law in 2012 could be a starting point for the possible future dismemberment of sex as a legal order.

Absent Bodies: Living Nations

In the Trans Memory Archive catalogue, Julieta La Trachyn wrote that the army imprisoned her and other travestis in the Pozo de Banfield, a detention center for political prisoners during the dictatorship. The soldiers forced them to clean the Ford Falcons with which the dictatorship kidnapped political activists. La Trachyn and her friends spent time cleaning the blood from the cars and looking

at the dozens of prisoners wearing hoods. While the soldiers were not watching, they whispered in the political prisoners' ears, "You are in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, in Banfield."⁷ Another example is Mayka, a pioneer of trans activism in Patagonia, who described how she escaped the dictatorial local government that added her name to a "black list" and then how, during democratic times, local politicians and policemen threatened to kill her.⁸

Even if trans people circulated in the same spaces and experienced similar cruelty as political prisoners, they are not socially recognized as victims of Argentine state authoritarianisms—in 2022 Julieta "La Trachyn" González was the first trans person to be legally recognized as a victim of state violence and to access an economic reparation. In 2023, a court summoned a group of travestis as witnesses in a case for human rights violations during the last dictatorship. In fact, the violence that they experienced was not restricted to a military order. That violence was an artifact protected by both military and civil governments. In Argentina we have developed a particular standard to measure and think about state violence. Political violence is usually associated with crimes committed against leftist activists during the dictatorship, and years before, by the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance. Then we have moral violence that persisted beyond the civil and military government with which state agents and members of a civil society persecuted sexual dissidents. This book shows how the repertoire of state violence was porous. The same agents who tortured the *desaparecidos* also raped travestis. This dialogue informs us about the nature of political violence in Argentina, and the centrality of the body for broader political projects and nation-building. Every time a policeman cut someone's hair, that simple echo vibrated through all our history. As previous studies have pointed out, such as Cole Rizki's, there is a pending question of how we should think about this dialogue between these two experiences and why one has more social value than the other.⁹ I want to underline that there is still violence that Argentine democracy has not acknowledged as part of its tradition.

In 2021 the Trans Memory Archive organized a federal *banderazo*, circulating a giant trans flag through every province in which trans people and their families could write victims' names: a collective archive grew through its movement. This action activated a broader national political memory: the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo used a blue flag to collect the names and photographs of the victims of state terrorism, making present those who were erased, making them march to the political center. Human rights movements' strategies and discourses were foundational for the LGBTTTIQ+ community. In the last forty years of democracy, the dialogue between both movements has created a powerful synergy to expand rights. State authorities generally rejected both movements until the twenty-first century.

LGBTTTIQ+ activists compiled the figure of 30,400 to mark the number of the LGBTTTIQ+ *desaparecidos* erased from the mainstream discourse of reparations, a way to inscribe themselves in a broader struggle for democracy. Marlene Wayar recently coined the term *identicidio* to claim state recognition of the systematic identity-based elimination of trans people.¹⁰ This is a claim with which trans people participated in a broader conversation about state violence and demanded social and economic reparation. The potency of the alleged "30,400 LGBTTTIQ+ disappeared" relies on the morality with which we imagine political violence. Its use also has risks, because it centers sexual violence during dictatorship in order to seek social recognition, which erases the role of civil governments in violent trans policing.¹¹ The question of the moral condition of the victim, that is to say, of who we should place at the core of the claim for justice, raises the question about whether its restriction to cisgender and heterosexual political activists limits our ideas of social justice. While sexuality is usually defined as a secondary element for thinking about broader social problems, by accepting this uncritically, there is always a risk of distinguishing worthy and unworthy victims of our claims.

This book also calls our attention to whether violence against trans bodies could tell us more about our political organization and the

limits of those times we define as democratic. Who was able to live a democratic life? Or who needed to be excluded from formulating this type of democratic regime? Gender history problematized the historical conception of the universal vote by highlighting women's exclusion; trans history should force us to reconsider the cisgendered limits of democracy. Is there full democracy when some members of society cannot walk in the daylight? Which democracy is it, and for whom? María Belén Correa often explains that democracy started for trans people in 2012 (rather than in 1983). This statement invites us to rethink the universal limits of notions such as democracy. It invites us to rethink other historical conceptualizations that contemplate, for example, the possibility of the existence of heterogeneous regimes in which some people enjoy liberal rights based on the broader exclusion of others.

In Argentina people frequently say that the body remembers. This popular phrase may have a second dimension in a country in which research on bones is still central in legal actions against those responsible for the dictatorship's crimes. This is a country that keeps talking to its past through the remnants of its victims. In this way all the violent restrictions with which the state tried to police people's ownership of their bodies persist in them. Indeed, all social exclusions are archived. Sex policing was a (dis)embodiment technique. The empowerment that allowed the police to rape and torture people based on their gender expression or erotic desire also produced Argentine trans bodies. That those bodies have not been publicly remembered also guarantees the persistence of the social condition that made their erasure possible.

Lost in the Archives of Shame

Finally, this book has a mandatory methodological consideration. While writing this historical narrative, I have tried to place myself in relation to these documents. Even if sometimes futilely, I tried to formulate questions about what these archives said about myself as a researcher in our contemporary society. While navigating archival documents, I usually felt ashamed. It was impossible to avoid

connecting newspaper chronicles laughing about trans protests or police reports about their imprisonment with my own experience as a cisgender gay man and the several times in which I (as a child) participated in situations in which these comments were reproduced. As queer little boys in the 1990s, we used to laugh about trans people in order to feel a little more included, outside that more extreme place of otherness. Like many other Argentines, I participated in a broader audience that consumed these articles and TV shows against trans bodies, maybe one of the most potent mechanisms of cisgender self-affirmation.

There is a pending history of cisgender embodiment. This history includes the multiple ways we all have experimented with embodying gender, as well as class, race, and age; the diets, workouts, hairdressing, clothing, dental prostheses, creams, clothes, and so forth that we use throughout our lives shape our material existence.¹² I do not want to overly compare my life with those I read about in the archives. I do not have to struggle to be called by my name or to walk down the street in daylight. However, I hope this book contributes to showing how society marks some of our embodiment practices as natural in contrast with others considered artificial and how these distinctions produce precarity for many. While I was talking with some friends in London, one of them described how his doctor's administration of testosterone was central to mitigating the effects of aging on his sexuality and body. A friend told me that when he was seven years old, he underwent surgery to take out the fat in his chest because children in his school told him he had tits. Such experiences speak to the broadly cultural frames that inform us about how class, race, and gender are embodied in Argentina. This book contributes to a history that describes the body as a material experience. It argues that neither class nor gender nor racial belonging is produced outside our bodies. If capitalism and dead labor transformed bodies into "living machines," why should we not believe that we are living laboratories of social class, racial, and sexual politics?

While I was working with representing lives in alterity, I struggled with small yet significant decisions, such as choosing names and

pronouns. Was I dissecting Raúl's body as the doctors did, in trying to understand the way his life and echoes transformed the modern sexual experience? I have tried to be aware of the risks of every methodological decision that guides this book. As I explain in the introduction, I use a methodology based on an attempt to interpret a changing embodied desire, and to do that I decided to believe in some documents more than in others. This book proposes an unruly journey through archives in which I tried to distrust, first of all, myself. The text also aims to contribute to an archive of shame—the recollection of those moments of complicity in which we might all have participated in making trans erasure possible. I hope to be part of a call for us to build new alliances, to break with moments of dangerous comfort, to make possible a new desirable and expansive trans future.

Acknowledgments

Authorship is a fiction that obscures the multiple intellectual and affective debts behind every academic project. I dedicate these words to all the colleagues, friends, and institutions that made this book possible.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie-Sklodowska Curie grant number 886496. This fellowship drastically changed my life, allowing me to work for two years at the Institute of the Americas of the University College London. This book grew in dialogue with this vibrant intellectual community; I am especially in debt to the mentorship of Professors Paulo Drinot and Jonathan Bell. I am thankful also to my colleagues at UCL, Kesewa Johns, Kate Quinn, Enrique Castañón Ballivian, Katherine Saunders-Hastings, Nick Witham, and Gareth Davies. I wouldn't have been able to develop my project without the mentorship and friendship of Professor Carolina Biernat and the always helpful comments of Professor María Bjerg. I presented drafts of this monograph at universities in Europe, the United States, Canada, and Latin America, where colleagues helped me take my ideas further. During this project, I was lucky to host the workshop Latin American Trans Histories with Professor Mir Yarfitz, one of the most generous colleagues I have ever had the fortune to work with and one of the most brilliant minds in the field. Many scholars read my manuscript and provided me with insightful feedback. I am very thankful to Javier Galeano Fernández, Lucía Cytryn, Andrés Mendieta, Ashley Kerr, Cecilia Tossounian, Francisco Romero Fernández, Salvador Ortiz-Vidal, Carlos Halaburda, Johana Kunin, Thomas Shalloe, Marce Joan Butierrez, and Janek Scholz, colleagues who helped me develop this project and with whom I crafted shared ideas. This book wouldn't be possible without Ricardo Lopez Pedrero, with whom I had long conversations about the relationship between sexuality and

power in Latin America. Still, more importantly, I am thankful to him for being my South American partner in crime in London. I am grateful to my colleagues at the University of Leeds for their support in the final stages of this book, especially Kim Allen and Jessica Martins.

The idea of this book started with some medical articles that I found in the library of the College of Medicine at the University of Buenos Aires, with few but powerful testimonies of people seeking to transgress gender norms. But, to be honest, this book grew with my friendship with Alba Rueda, who drastically transformed my understanding of social reality. I am forever indebted to Alba, not only because I deeply admire her advocacy for social justice but also for all the hours of conversation and for reminding me that friendship can also be a radical politics of care.

My book was possible due to the work of archivists that are transforming the place of trans lives in Argentina's history. I am thankful to all those that work to preserve and make trans and queer lives visible in Argentina, the protagonists of a trans revolution in our understanding of national history. To all the members of the Archivo de la Memoria Trans, especially Cecilia Estalles and María Belén Correa, to Juan Pablo Queiroz from the Archivos Desviados, Mabel Bellucci from Moléculas Malucas, and to Natalia Gil and Mary Robles from the Archivo y Memoria LGTBIQ de Salta, among the multiple archivists and librarians that supported this work, thank you.

Finally, I am grateful to my partner, Joe, whose love helped me survive the northern hostility and make this place my home. To my friends Noelia and Josefina for always being available. To my parents, my siblings, and especially my little niece Vicentina. This book is a pledge for a future where everyone can live their lives as beautiful experiments. I dedicate this book to all those who lost their lives in the everyday fight to have a body of their own. To the *históricas/históricos*: ¡reparación histórica ya!

Notes

INTRODUCTION. IN THE FLESH OF (NATIONAL) HISTORY

1. It is difficult to define travesti, as it is a changing historical reality. Travesti is an identity that defines people assigned at birth as male who embody a female corporeality. In contrast with transsexuals, travestis do not always search for gender-affirmation genital surgery. Although I acknowledge the potential of trans as an umbrella concept to name a plurality of experiences, I use the word *travesti* in Spanish in this book to highlight their particular bodily experience, which is characterized by the intersections of racialization, working-class culture, and femininity. For a recent history of this category in South America, read Mir Yarfitz and Marce Joan Butierrez, “Trans and Travesti Identities in Twentieth-Century South America,” *Latin American History Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, forthcoming. On the use of the term “trans” as an umbrella concept and the definition of cissexism, read Blas Radi, “On Trans* Epistemology: Critiques, Contributions, and Challenges,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no 1 (2019): 43–63.

2. I have analyzed this text in coauthorship with Marce Joan Butierrez. See Patricio Simonetto and Marce Butierrez, “The Archival Riot: Travesti/Trans* Audiovisual Memory Politics in Twenty-First-Century Argentina,” *Memory Studies* 16, no. 2 (2022): 1–16.

3. Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2016).

4. Ashley Elizabeth Kerr, *Sex, Skulls, and Citizens: Gender and Racial Science in Argentina (1860–1910)* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2020).

5. Carolina Biernat and Karina Inés Ramacciotti, *Crece y multiplicarse: La política sanitaria materno-infantil: Argentina 1900–1960*, Colección Ciudadanía e inclusión (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2013).

6. See below for a discussion of the meaning of the term *trans*.

7. *Cisgender* refers to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with the one that was attached to them after birth.

8. Paulina L. Alberto, *Black Legend: The Many Lives of Raúl Grigera and the Power of Racial Storytelling in Argentina* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 14–17.

9. Ignacio Borgogno, “La transfobia en América Latina y el Caribe: Un estudio en el marco de REDLACTRANS” (2013), available at <http://redlactrans.org.ar/site/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/La-Transfobia-en-America-Latina-y-el-Caribe.pdf>.
10. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (New York: Seal Press, 2008).
11. Elizabeth Jelin, “The Politics of Memory: The Human Rights Movement and the Construction of Democracy in Argentina,” *Latin American Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (1994): 38–58.
12. Santiago Joaquín Insausti, “Los cuatrocientos homosexuales desaparecidos: Memorias de la represión estatal a las sexualidades disidentes en Argentina,” in *Deseo y represión: Sexualidad, Género y Estado en la historia argentina reciente*, ed. Débora D’Antonio (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2015), 63–82.
13. See Simonetto and Butierrez, “The Archival Riot.”
14. Cole Rizki, “‘No State Apparatus Goes to Bed Genocidal Then Wakes Up Democratic’: Fascist Ideology and Transgender Politics in Post-dictatorship Argentina,” *Radical History Review* 2020 138 (2020): 82–107; Patricio Simonetto and Marce Butierrez, “The Archival Riot: Travesti/Trans* Audiovisual Memory Politics in Twenty-First-Century Argentina,” *Memory Studies*, vol. 0 First Published/Ahead of Print (2022): 1–16; Barbara Sutton, *Surviving State Terror: Women’s Testimonies of Repression and Resistance in Argentina* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).
15. Insausti, “Cuatrocientos homosexuales desaparecidos.”
16. Rizki, “No State Apparatus Goes to Bed Genocidal Then Wakes Up Democratic.”
17. Marlene Wayar, *Travesti: Una teoría lo suficientemente buena* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Muchas Nueces, 2018).
18. Archivo de la Memoria Trans y Fieiras, *Archivo de la Memoria Trans* (Buenos Aires: CHACO, 2020).
19. Invertido, or sexual inversion, was a medical concept that circulated globally between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was usually used to describe people marked as male after birth who dressed occasionally or regularly as female, whether or not they had sex with people of the “same sex.” See David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 10–11.
20. Stryker, *Transgender History*, 36.
21. Stryker, *Transgender History*, 24.
22. The concept of sex change has a negative connotation among the trans community. In this book, I use it as a concept of its time with which people defined (and sometime still define) gender-affirmation practices.

23. Bernice L. Hausman, *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).
24. Marcia Ochoa, *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
25. A pioneering work on the legal and medical history of transness in Argentina is Anahí Farji Neer, *Travestismo, transexualidad y trasgeneridad en los discursos del Estado argentino: Desde los edictos policiales hasta la ley de identidad de género* (Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2017).
26. Osvaldo Quijada et al., *El cambio de sexo* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Antropológica Médico-Legal de Chile, 1968).
27. Rafael Amadeo Gentili, *Me va a tener que acompañar: Una visión crítica sobre los edictos policiales* (Buenos Aires: El Naranjo, 1995).
28. María Marta Aversa and Matías Máximo, *Si te viera tu madre: Activismos y andanzas de Claudia Pía Baudracco* (La Plata: UNLP, 2021).
29. For an analysis of cissexism and the portrayal of transness as an artificial reality, see Mauro Cabral, “Cissexual,” *Página 12*, June 5, 2009, and Radi, “On Trans* Epistemology.”
30. Thiago Barcelos Soliva, “Sobre o talento de ser fabulosa: Os ‘shows de travesti’ e a invenção da ‘travesti profissional,’” *Cadernos Pagu* 53 (2018).
31. Kerr, *Sex, Skulls, and Citizens*.
32. Kevin Coleman, “The Photos That We Don’t Get to See: Sovereignities, Archives, and the 1928 Massacre of Banana Workers in Colombia,” in *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 104–133.
33. Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, 4 (1980): 631–660.
34. María Elena Martínez, “Archives, Bodies, and Imagination: The Case of Juana Aguilar and Queer Approaches to History, Sexuality, and Politics,” *Radical History Review* 2014, no. 120 (2014): 159–182.
35. Javier Fernández Galeano, “Running Mascara: The Hermeneutics of Trans Visual Archives in Late Franco-Era Spain,” *Radical History Review* 2022, no. 142 (2022): 72–92.
36. Elizabeth Edwards, “Photography and the Material Performance of the Past,” *History and Theory* (2009): 130–150.
37. See Francisco Fernández Romero and Andrés Mendieta, “Toward a Trans* Masculine Genealogy in South America,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (2022): 524–534.
38. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader*, vol. 1 (Taylor & Francis, 2006); Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, “Transgender and

Transsexual Studies: Sociology's Influence and Future Steps," *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 2 (2008): 433–450.

39. Aren Z. Aizura, *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Alex Bakker et al., *Others of my Kind: Transatlantic Transgender Histories* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2020); Peter Boag, "Go West Young Man, Go East Young Woman: Searching for the Trans in Western Gender History," *Western Historical Quarterly* 36, 4 (2005): 477–497; Fernanda Carvajal, "Image Politics and Disturbing Temporalities: On 'Sex Change' Operations in the Early Chilean Dictatorship," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2018): 621–637; Rachel Hope Cleves, "Six Ways of Looking at a Trans Man? The Life of Frank Shimer (1826–1901)," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 27, no. 1 (2018): 32–62; Elias Ferreira Veras, *Travestis: Carne, tinta e papel* (Brazil: Editora Appris, 2020); Juliana Martínez, "Dressed Like a Man? Of Language, Bodies, and Monsters in the Trial of Enrique/Enriqueta Favez and Its Contemporary Accounts," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 2 (2017): 188–206; Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Emily Skidmore, *True Sex: The Lives of Trans Men at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2019); Stryker, *Transgender History*; Mary Kay Vaughan, Gabriela Cano, and Jocelyn H. Olcott, *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

40. Stryker and Whittle, *Transgender Studies Reader*.

41. Marlene Wayar, *Diccionario travesti de la T a la T* (Buenos Aires: Página 12, 2020).

42. Finn Enke, "Transgender History (and Otherwise Approaches to Queer Embodiment)," in *The Routledge History of Queer America* (UK: Routledge, 2018), 224–236.

43. María Soledad Cutuli, "Maricas y travestis: Repensando experiencias compartidas," *Sociedad y economía*, no. 24 (2013): 183–206; Ana Gabriela Alvarez, "Cuerpos transitantes: Para una historia de las identidades travesti-trans en la Argentina," *AVA* 1, no. 1 (2019): 45–71.

44. Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

45. Daniel Bao, "Invertidos Sexuales, Tortilleras, and Maricas Machos: The Construction of Homosexuality in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1900–1950," *Journal of Homosexuality* 24, no. 3–4 (1993): 183–220; Karina Inés Ramacciotti and Adriana María Valobra, "El campo médico argentino y su mirada al tribadismo, 1936–1955," *Revista estudios feministas* 16, no. 2

(2008): 493–516; Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García, *Hermaphroditism, Medical Science and Sexual Identity in Spain, 1850–1960*, Iberian and Latin American Studies (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009); Veronika Fuechtner, Douglas E. Haynes, and Ryan M. Jones, *A Global History of Sexual Science, 1880–1960*, vol. 26 (California: University of California Press, 2017); D. Jones, C. Figari, and S. Barrón López, *La producción de la sexualidad: Políticas y regulaciones sexuales en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2012); Anahí Farji Neer, *Travestismo, transexualidad y trasgeneridad en los discursos del Estado argentino: Desde los edictos policiales hasta la ley de identidad de género* (Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2017).

46. Eric Plemons, *The Look of a Woman: Facial Feminization Surgery and the Aims of Trans-Medicine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

47. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

48. Pablo Ben and Santiago Joaquín Insausti, “Dictatorial Rule and Sexual Politics in Argentina: The Case of the Frente de Liberación Homosexual, 1967–1976,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (2017): 297–325; Rafael De la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Felipe Caro, “Más allá de Stonewall: El Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual de Colombia y las redes de activismo internacional, 1976–1989,” *Historia Crítica*, no. 75 (2020): 93–114; María Soledad Cutuli, “Travesti Associations, State Policies, and NGOs: Resistance and Collective Action in Buenos Aires, Argentina,” *Sexualities* 18, no. 3 (2015): 297–309; Fernández Galeano, “Running Mascara”; James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Natalia Milanesio, *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina: The Rise of Popular Consumer Culture* (Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2013); Patricio Simonetto, “Movimientos de liberación homosexual en América Latina: Aportes historiográficos desde una perspectiva comparada entre Argentina, Brasil, Chile, Colombia y México (1967–1982),” *Iberoamericana*, 2017, 157–177.

49. Jorge Luis Peralta, *Paisajes de varones: Genealogías del homoerotismo en la literatura argentina*, 1st ed., Akademia. Mujeres y culturas 168 (Barcelona: Icaria, 2017); Carlos Figari, *Eróticas de la disidencia en América Latina: Brasil, siglos XVII al XX* (CLACSO, 2009); Pablo Ben, “Male Sexuality, the Popular Classes and the State: Buenos Aires, 1880–1955,” PhD diss., Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009; Santiago Joaquín Insausti, “Selva, plumas y desconche: Un análisis de las performances masculinas de la feminidad entre las locas del Tigre durante la década del ochenta,” *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios sobre Cuerpos, Emociones y Sociedad* 3, no. 7

- (2011): 29–42; Jorge Salessi, *Médicos, maleantes y maricas: Higiene, criminología y homosexualidad en la construcción de la nación argentina (Buenos Aires, 1871–1914)* (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo, 1995), 205–212; Daniel Bao, “Invertidos Sexuales, Tortilleras, and Maricas Machos: The Construction of Homosexuality in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1900–1950,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 24, no. 3–4 (1993): 183–220; Omar Acha and Pablo Ben, “Amorales, patoteros, chongos y pitucos: La homosexualidad masculina durante el primer peronismo [Buenos Aires, 1943–1955],” *Trabajos y comunicaciones*, no. 30–31 (2004); Green, *Beyond Carnival*; Patricio Simonetto, “Intimididades disidentes: Intersecciones en las experiencias de homosexuales y lesbianas en Buenos Aires durante los sesenta y setenta,” *Trashumante: Revista Americana de Historia Social*, no. 11 (2018): 28–50.
50. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*.
 51. Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
 52. Marcia Ochoa, “La ciudadanía ingrata,” *El lugar sin límites: Revista de estudios y políticas de género* 1, no. 2 (2019): 69–83.
 53. Ochoa, “Ciudadanía ingrata.”
 54. De la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil*.
 55. Benjamin A. Cowan, *Securing Sex: Morality and Repression in the Making of Cold War Brazil* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press Books, 2016); Natalia Milanesio, *Destape: Sex, Democracy, and Freedom in Postdictatorial Argentina* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019); Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press Books, 2014).
 56. Alberto, *Black Legend*; Ben, “Male Sexuality, the Popular Classes and the State”; Santiago Joaquín Insausti, “Cuatrocientos homosexuales desaparecidos,” 63–82; Rizki, “No State Apparatus Goes to Bed Genocidal Then Wakes Up Democratic,” 82–107.
 57. Jules Gill-Peterson, “The Cis State II,” Substack newsletter, *Sad Brown Girl* (blog), June 3, 2022, <https://sadbrowngirl.substack.com/p/the-cis-state-ii>.
 58. Milanesio, *Destape*.
 59. Diana Maffía et al., *Sexualidades migrantes género y transgénero* (Buenos Aires: Feminaria Editora, 2003), 121–137.
 60. Daniel Jones, “Entrevista con Lohana Berkins,” *CLAM* 1, no. 1 (2006): 1–20.
 61. Lynn M. Thomas, *Beneath the Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners*, Theory in Forms (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).
 62. Siobhan Fenella Guerrero McManus and Leah Muñoz Contreras, “Epistemologías transfeministas e identidad de género en la infancia: Del

esencialismo al sujeto del saber,” *Revista interdisciplinaria de estudios de género de el Colegio de México* 4 (2018): 12; Plemons, *Look of a Woman*; Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012).

63. Alba Rueda, “Aportes del movimiento travesti-trans a las políticas decoloniales en América del Sur,” in Mariano Lopez Seoane, ed., *Los mil y un pequeños sexos*, UNTREF (Buenos Aires, 2016).

64. Josefina Fernández and Lohana Berkins, *La Berkins: Una combatiente de frontera* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2020). The first work against this universalization in English can be seen in Don Kulick’s pioneer ethnography in Brazil; see Don Kulick, *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*, *Worlds of Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

65. Cole Rizki, “Latin/x American Trans Studies: Toward a Travesti-Trans Analytic,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (2019): 145–155.

66. Marlene Wayar, *Furia travesti: Diccionario de la T a la T* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2021), 106–108.

67. Isaiah Matthew Wooden, “Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval by Saidiya Hartman,” *Theatre Journal* 71, no. 4 (2019): 537–538.

CHAPTER 1. CUT FROM A DIFFERENT CLOTH

1. The article uses feminine pronouns sarcastically. Based on the references to her female role in her community, I choose to narrate this person with feminine pronouns.

2. *Caras y caretas* (hereafter *CyC*), May 17, 1902, no. 189.

3. *CyC*, May 17, 1902, no. 189, 39.

4. Jorge Salessi, *Médicos maleantes y maricas*.

5. Gentili, *Me va a tener que acompañar*.

6. Dora Barrancos, “Problematic Modernity: Gender, Sexuality, and Reproduction in Twentieth-Century Argentina,” *Journal of Women’s History* 18, no. 2 (2006): 123–150.

7. Carlos Gustavo Halaburda, “Lunfardos: Queerness, Social Prophylaxis, and the Futures of Reproduction in Fin-de-Siècle Argentine Dramaturgy,” *Latin American Theatre Review* 54, no. 2 (2021): 119–143; Mir Yarfitz, *Impure Migration: Jews and Sex Work in Golden Age Argentina* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019).

8. Mir Yarfitz, “La Bella Otero’s Overdetermined Anal: Tales of Sexual Inversion in Early Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, no. 70 (2023), forthcoming.

9. Javier Fernández Galeano, “Cartas desde Buenos Aires: El movimiento homosexual argentino desde una perspectiva transnacional,” *Latin American Research Review* 54, no. 3 (2019): 608–622.
10. Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*, 13.
11. Carlos Figari notes that between 1880 and 1930, physicians used concepts such as “passive pederast” and “pseudo-hermaphrodite” as synonyms. See Carlos Figari, “La invención de la sexualidad: El homosexual en la medicina argentina (1880–1930),” in *La producción de la sexualidad: Políticas y regulaciones sexuales en Argentina*, ed. D. Jones, Carlos Figari, and S. Barrón López (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2012).
12. Leah DeVun y Zeb Tortorici, “Trans, Time, and History,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2018): 518–539; Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*; Stryker, *Transgender History*.
13. This perspective dominated the first generation of gay history. See Bao, “Invertidos Sexuales, Tortilleras, and Maricas Machos 183–220; Osvaldo Bazán, *Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina: De la conquista de América al siglo XXI*, 4th ed. (Buenos Aires: Marea Editorial, 2016).
14. Chauncey, *Gay New York*.
15. Bao, “Invertidos Sexuales, Tortilleras, and Maricas Machos”; Ben, “Male Sexuality, the Popular Classes and the State”; Santiago Joaquín Insausti, “Selva, plumas y desconche,” 29–42; Salessi, *Médicos, maleantes y maricas*.
16. Bao, “Invertidos Sexuales, Tortilleras, and Maricas Machos”; Bazán, *Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina*. The pioneering and groundbreaking work of Salessi, *Médicos, maleantes y maricas* usually moved between describing the multiplicity of these experiences and the association of crossdressing and travestis with homosexuality—by relating gender transgression with sporadic practices as “men having affective and sexual relations with other men” (179–180). The author has published a revision version of this book that I couldn’t read before this monograph’s publication.
17. Yarfitz, “La Bella Otero’s Overdetermined Analilty.”
18. For a previous nonteleological perspective, read Cutuli, “Maricas y travestis.”
19. Ben, “Male Sexuality, the Popular Classes and the State.”
20. Chauncey, *Gay New York*.
21. Yarfitz, “La Bella Otero’s Overdetermined Analilty.”
22. Salessi, “Médicos, maleantes y maricas”; Figari, “La invención de la sexualidad.”
23. Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*.
24. Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*.
25. Yarfitz, “La Bella Otero’s Overdetermined Analilty.”

26. Francisco de Veyga was born in 1866. He was one the best-known specialists in criminology and sexuality. From 1899 he was the head of the Legal Medicine Cathedra at Buenos Aires University. The cases that he presented were taken from the Service of Control of Alienated People, created in 1899 under his medical direction.

27. Francisco De Veyga, “La inversión sexual adquirida. Tipo de invertido profesional. Tipo de invertido por sugestión. Tipo de invertido por causa de decaimiento mental,” *Archivos de psiquiatría, criminología y ciencias afines* 2 (1903): 193–200.

28. Francisco de Veyga, “La inversión sexual adquirida. Tipo profesional: Un invertido comerciante,” *Archivos de psiquiatría, criminología y ciencias afines* 2 (1903): 492–496.

29. Francisco de Veyga, “La inversión sexual adquirida. Tipo profesional: Un invertido comerciante.”

30. Veyga, “La inversión sexual adquirida. Tipo de invertido profesional. Tipo de invertido por sugestión. Tipo de invertido por causa de decaimiento mental.”

31. Pablo Ben, “Plebeian Masculinity and Sexual Comedy in Buenos Aires, 1880–1930,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 3 (2007): 436–458.

32. Yarfitz, “La Bella Otero’s Overdetermined Anality.”

33. Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

34. Salessi, *Médicos, maleantes y maricas*.

35. Carolyne Larson, ed., *The Conquest of the Desert: Argentina’s Indigenous Peoples and the Battle for History*, 1st ed. Diálogos series (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020).

36. Salessi, *Médicos, maleantes y maricas*.

37. Alberto, *Black Legend*; Kerr, *Sex, Skulls, and Citizens*.

38. Kerr, *Sex, Skulls, and Citizens*.

39. Paulina Alberto and Eduardo Elena, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

40. Carlos Masotta, “Cuerpos dóciles y miradas encontradas. Miniaturización de los cuerpos e indicios de la resistencia en postales de indios argentinas (1900–1940),” *Revista chilena de antropología visual* 3 (2003): 1–16.

41. Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina*, vol. 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Patricio Simonetto, *El dinero no es todo*; Yarfitz, *Impure migration*; Omar Acha, *Crónica sentimental de la Argentina peronista: Sexo, inconsciente e ideología, 1945–1955*, Prometeo bicentenario (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2014).

42. Alberto, *Black Legend*.
43. Heike Bauer, Melina Pappademos, and Katie Sutton, "Visual Histories of Sex: Collecting, Curating, Archiving," *Radical History Review* 2022, no. 142 (June 1, 2022): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-9397002>.
44. Kerr, *Sex, Skulls, and Citizens*.
45. *CyC*, no. 189, May 17, 1902.
46. Lily Cho, "Intimacy among Strangers: Anticipating Citizenship in Chinese Head Tax Photographs," *Interventions* 15, no. 1 (2013): 10–23.
47. José Ingenieros, "La vanidad criminal," *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines*, no. 3 (1906): 14–23.
48. Salessi, "Médicos, maleantes y maricas."
49. *CyC*, April 17, 1909, 51.
50. *Vanguardia* 3, no. 43 (October 24, 1896): 4.
51. *Crítica*, December 20, 1919, 2.
52. Cristiana Schettini, "Circuitos de trabalho no mercado de diversões sul americano no começo do século XX," *Cadernos AEL*, 2010.
53. Osvaldo Sosa Cordero, *Historia de las varietés en Buenos Aires (1900–1925)* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1978).
54. *CyC*, no. 293, May 14, 1904.
55. Cordero, *Historia de las varietés en Buenos Aires (1900–1925)*.
56. *Nación* 61, no. 13060 (April 17, 1910): 11.
57. *Vanguardia* 14, no. 820 (July 8, 1908): 3.
58. *PBT*, 1907, no. 160; *Caras y caretas*, 141-2-1907, no. 480.
59. Cordero, *Historia de las varietés en Buenos Aires (1900–1925)*; *Nación*, September 3, 1905, 7.
60. *Crítica*, March 24, 1922, 2. *Marimacho* could be translated as "almost a man." This malleable concept was used to define masculine women. Carlos Halaburda is currently working on a forthcoming book on this topic.
61. *PBT*, no. 10 (1934): 10.
62. Malva, *Mi recordatorio: Autobiografía de Malva*. Vidas (Buenos Aires: Libros del Rojas, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2011).
63. Jules Huret, *En Argentine: De La Plata à la Cordillère des Andes, avec une carte de la République Argentine* (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1913).
64. María Soledad Cutuli and Santiago Insausti, "Cabarets, corsos y teatros de revista: Espacios de transgresión y celebración en la memoria marica," *Memorias, identidades y experiencias trans: (In)visibilidades entre Argentina y España* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2015).
65. *PBT*, September 7, 1910, 67.
66. Salessi, "Médicos, maleantes y maricas."
67. Ruben Pesce, *La historia del tango, la guardia vieja* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1977), 344–346.

68. *Crítica*, February 23, 1915, 5; *Crítica*, April 12, 1915, 9; *Crítica*, May 28, 1920, 3.
69. *Nación*, vol. 48, no. 16474 (October 29, 1917): 2; *Crítica*, May 23, 1920, 4; *Crilla Razon* 17, no. 4568 (June 10, 1921): 4.
70. Anahí Viladrich, “Neither Virgins nor Whores: Tango Lyrics and Gender Representations in the Tango World,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 39, no. 2 (2006): 272–293.
71. *CyC*, no. 1.644 (April 5, 1930): 55; *CyC*, no. 1.534 (February 25, 1928): 72; *Canción Moderna* 7, October 2, 1933.
72. Matthew B. Karush, *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920–1946* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
73. Ludmila Scheinkman, “‘¿Dónde están los machos?’ Sindicalización anarquista, masculina y femenina, en la industria del dulce (Buenos Aires, 1920–1929),” *Archivos de historia del movimiento obrero y la izquierda*, no. 7 (2015): 15–35.
74. José González Castillo, *Los invertidos* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1991).
75. Yarfitz, “La Bella Otero’s Overdetermined Analogy.”
76. Cited and translated by Mir Yarfitz, “La Bella Otero’s Overdetermined Analogy.”
77. Jorge Luis Peralta and Patricio Simonetto, “Una lengua impropia: Hacia una historia del argot gay en Argentina (1880–2010),” in *Palabras para una tribu: Estudios sobre argot gay en Argentina, España y México*, ed. Jorge Luis Peralta and Rafael Mérida Jimenéz (Madrid: Egales, 2020).
78. Tomasini Lehmann-Nitsche and Cáceres Freyre, *Textos eróticos del Río de la Plata: Ensayo lingüístico sobre textos sicalípticos*, vol. 1 (Librería Clásica, 1981).
79. Castillo, *Los invertidos*.
80. Lehmann-Nitsche, *Textos eróticos del Río de la Plata*.
81. Carlos Roche, “Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide,” Doctoral thesis, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1904.
82. Roche, “Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide,” 51–60.
83. Roche, “Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide,” 51–60.
84. Pablo Ben, “Muéstrame tus genitales y te diré quién eres: El hermafroditismo en la Argentina finisecular y de principios del siglo XX,” in *Cuerpos, géneros e identidades, Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones el Siglo, 2000). About medical interventions in intersexual bodies, read Mauro Cabral Grinspan, “De monstruos conjurando: intersexualidad y biotecnologías de la identidad,” PhD thesis, University of Córdoba, 2006.
85. Roche, “Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide.”

86. About the field of intersex studies, read Mauro Cabral and Gabriel Benzur, “Cuando digo intersex: Un diálogo introductorio a la intersexualidad,” *Cadernos Pagu*, no. 24 (2005): 283–304.

87. Chiara Beccalossi, “Types, norms, and normalisation: Hormone research and treatments in Italy, Argentina, and Brazil, c. 1900–50,” *History of the Human Sciences* 34, no. 2 (2021): 113–137.

88. Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*.

89. Roche, “Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide,” 58.

90. Roche, “Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide,” 51–60.

91. Roche, “Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide,” 51–60.

92. In consulted documents this person is presented as “XX” to protect his identity. XX is first narrated as a woman and then as a man. I chose to call him Juan to mark his self-perceived gender, taking into consideration that in the letter attached to the medical research, the author referred to himself with male pronouns.

93. Historical Justice Department, Buenos Aires Province, Central Catalog, La Plata, Data-Base.

94. Roche, “Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide,” 66.

95. Roche, “Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide,” 61–72.

96. *CyC*, no. 217 (November 29, 1902): 60.

97. Roche, “Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide,” 61–72.

98. Skidmore, *True Sex*.

99. Dora Barrancos, “Mujeres en la Argentina: Un balance frente al Bicentenario,” *Revista de Trabajo* 6, no. 8 (2010): 323–331.

100. Adriana Valobra, “Feminismo, sufragismo y mujeres en los partidos políticos en la Argentina de la primera mitad del siglo XX,” *Amnis: Revue d'études des sociétés et cultures contemporaines Europe/Amérique*, no. 8 (2008): 10–28.

101. I have reconstructed Raúl Luis Suárez’s life by consulting press articles of papers such as *CyC*, *La Nación*, *El Diario*, *Última Hora*, *Crónica*, and *Delito*.

102. The case of Raúl Luis Suárez is also being studied by Mir Yarfitz, such as in his unpublished presentation to the Latin American Studies Association Conference in 2019; see Mir Yarfitz, “Tragic Inverts or Bold Women-Men? Popular vs. Expert Responses to Crossdressing and Gender Bending in Early Twentieth-Century Argentina” (panel “Jews, Maricas, and Other Marginal Subjects: Claiming ‘Argentinidad’ and Contesting Markers of Difference in Twentieth-Century Argentina”—Latin American Studies Association, Barcelona, 2019).

103. “Argentina, censo nacional, 1895,” database with images, FamilySearch, Modesto Suarez, 1895; citing Sección 04, La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

104. *La Nación*, April 7, 1930.
105. *El Diario*, April 3, 1930.
106. *La Nación*, April 3, 1930.
107. *La Nación*, April 7, 1930.
108. *Crítica*, April 1, 1930.
109. *Última Hora*, April 1, 1930.
110. Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso Books, 2015).
111. See *CyC*, no. 1.652 (May 31, 1930): 76; *Causa y delito*, no. 3 (1973): 21.
112. *El Diario*, March 31, 1930.
113. *Última hora*, April 23, 1930.
114. *Ahora*, no. 3059, December 21, 1962.
115. *Ahora*, no. 3059, December 21, 1962.
116. Pablo Ben, "Plebeian Masculinity and Sexual Comedy in Buenos Aires, 1880–1930," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 3 (2007): 436–458; Sandra Gayol, *Sociabilidad en Buenos Aires: Hombres, honor y cafés, 1862–1910*, vol. 1 (Ediciones del signo, 2000).
117. *CyC*, no. 377 (December 23, 1905): 55.
118. *Nación* (March 15, 1907): 8.
119. Pablo Ben, "Male Same-Sex Sexuality and the Argentine State, 1880–1930," *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America: A Reader on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights*, 2010, 33–43.
120. Francisco de Veyga, "Invertido sexual imitando a mujer honesta," *Archivo de criminología y medicina legal y psiquiatría* 1 (1902): 368–380.
121. Ben, "Male Sexuality, the Popular Classes and the State."
122. De Veyga, "Invertido sexual imitando a mujer honesta."
123. Ben, "Male Sexuality, the Popular Classes and the State."
124. Antonio Dellepiane, *El idioma del delito* (Buenos Aires: Arnoldo Moen, 1894); Antonio Dellepiane, *El idioma del delito y diccionario lunfardo* (Buenos Aires: Fabril, 1967); Ernesto Gómez, *La mala vida en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: J. Roldan, 1908.)
125. Peralta and Simonetto, "Una lengua impropia."
126. O. Schwartz, *Historia natural del hombre* (Buenos Aires: Claridad, 1930).
127. Cecilia Tossounian, *La Joven Moderna in Interwar Argentina: Gender, Nation, and Popular Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020).
128. Diego Armus, *The Ailing City: Health, Tuberculosis, and Culture in Buenos Aires, 1870–1950* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
129. Diego Galeano and Cristiana Schettini, "Una historia verosímil de la princesa Borbón: Trabajo, género y sexualidad en América del Sur, 1905–1919," in *Trabajos y trabajadores en América Latina (siglos XVI–XXI)*, edited

by Rossano Barragán Romano, Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia (La Paz: Vicepresidencia del estado, 2019).

130. Marcos Bembo, *La mala vida en Barcelona* (Barcelona: Manucci, 1912), 251.

131. Bembo, *La mala vida en Barcelona*, 251.

132. Benigno B. Lugones, *Crónicas, folletines y otros escritos* (1879–1884), Estudio preliminar de Diego Galeano (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, 2011), 164.

133. Galeano and Schettini, “Una historia verosímil de la princesa Borbón.”

134. Juan José Soiza Reilly, “Ladrones vestidos de mujer,” *Fray Mocho*, no. 5 (1912): 67–72.

135. *Crítica*, August 6, 1919, 2.

136. Salessi, *Médicos, maleantes y maricas*.

137. *Crítica*, May 24, 1915, 6; *Crítica*, August 16, 1915, 9; *Vanguardia* 21, no. 3026 (December 9, 1915): 3.

138. She was referring to a masturbation practice.

139. Chino is a man from the countryside. Lehmann-Nitsche and Freyre, *Textos eróticos del Río de la Plata*.

140. “Del buen retiro a la Alameda / Los gustos locos me vengo a hacer / Muchachos téngalo tieso/que con la mano gusto os daré / Con paragüitas y cascabeles / Y hasta con guante yo os las haré / por darte gusto la embocaré / Si con la boca yo te incomodo / y por la espalda me quieres dar / no tengas miedo, chinito mío / no tengo pliegues ya por detrás / Si con la boca yo te incomodo / y por atrás me quieres amar / no tengas miedo, chinito mío / que pronto vas a gozar.” In Veyga, “La inversión sexual adquirida. Tipo de invertido profesional. Tipo de invertido por sugestión. Tipo de invertido por causa de decaimiento mental.”

141. Soiza Reilly, “Ladrones vestidos de mujer.”

142. Gisela Paola Kaczan, “La práctica gimnástica y el deporte, la cultura física y el cuerpo bello en la historia de las mujeres: Argentina 1900–1930,” *Historia crítica*, no. 61 (2016): 23–43.

143. Gómez, *La mala vida en Buenos Aires*, 194–195.

144. Soiza Reilly, “Ladrones vestidos de mujer.”

145. Gómez, *La mala vida en Buenos Aires*, 194–195.

146. Veyga, “La inversión sexual adquirida. Tipo de invertido profesional. Tipo de invertido por sugestión. Tipo de invertido por causa de decaimiento mental.”

147. *Vanguardia* 20, no. 2300 (September 11, 1913): 4; *Vanguardia* 21, no. 2682 (December 2, 1914): 3.

148. Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina*.

149. Alberto, *Black Legend*.

150. Gentili, *Me va a tener que acompañar*.

CHAPTER 2. THE BODY I WAS BORN IN

1. *La Razón*, July 2, 1961.
2. *Así*, February 20, 1963, 370, Archivo Desviados.
3. Acha and Ben, “Amorales, patoteros, chongos y pitucos.”
4. Beccalossi, “Types, norms, and normalization.”
5. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*.
6. Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la Argentina: Biografía de un país: Desde la conquista española hasta nuestros días*, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires: Crítica, 2020); Milanesio, *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina*.
7. Karush, *Culture of Class*.
8. Ernesto Semán, *Breve historia del antipopulismo: Los intentos por domesticar a la Argentina plebeya, de 1810 a Macri*, Singular (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2021).
9. Acha, *Crónica sentimental de la Argentina peronista*.
10. Carolina Biernat, “Médicos, especialistas, políticos y funcionarios en la organización centralizada de la profilaxis de las enfermedades venéreas en la Argentina (1930–1954),” *Anuario de estudios americanos* 64, no. 1 (2007): 257–288; Marisa Miranda, *Controlar lo incontrolable: Una historia de la sexualidad en la Argentina*, Historia Biblos (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2011).
11. *Así*, August 25, 1966.
12. Anahí Farji Neer, *Travestismo, transexualidad y transgeneridad en los discursos del Estado argentino: Desde los edictos policiales hasta la ley de identidad de género* (Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2017).
13. Argentine Criminal and Penal Code, available at www.infoleg.com.
14. Beccalossi, “Types, Norms, and Normalisation.”
15. *Cultura sexual y física*, TII (1940): 715.
16. Carlos Da Gris, *El homosexual en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Continental Service, 1965), 14.
17. *Hombre de América*, N2, 1940.
18. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 51–67.
19. Laura Fernández Cordero, “Una avalancha de obras dedicadas al sexo: Revistas de las izquierdas argentinas en la primera mitad del siglo XX,” *Caderno de letras*, no. 39 (2021): 93–109.
20. José Belbey, “La medicina legal sobre *travestissement*,” *La semana médica*, no. 23 (1955): 123–144.
21. Belbey, “La medicina legal sobre *travestissement*”; Rinaldo Pellegrini, *Sexuología* (Madrid: Morata, 1950).

22. Belbey, “La medicina legal sobre *travestissement*.”
23. Richard Von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902) is considered one of the founders of “sexual science.” His book *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) was one of the first compendiums of alleged sexual perversions. He defined travestism as a “metamorphosis sexualis paranoia.” Sometimes he described it as similar to what in the future would be called the theory of the “wrong body,” this is to say, people who understood that they were trapped in the wrong-gendered body. See Vern L. Bullough, “Transsexualism in History,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 4, no. 5 (1975): 561–571.
24. Pellegrini, *Sexuología*.
25. Malva, *Mi recordatorio*.
26. Malva, “El casamiento de Jorgelina,” *El teje*, no. 4 (2009).
27. “Agote’s law” (no. 10.903) promoted that children in an “irregular condition”—based on moral prescriptions of gender, class and age—be placed by charity organizations and public institutions as workers in order to “educate” them in a productive culture. Read Donna J. Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880–1955* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
28. Inés Pérez, “Domestic Workers’ Experiences of Motherhood in Mid-Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires,” *Women’s History Review* 30, no. 2 (2020): 208–222.
29. Belbey, “Sobre *travestissement*,” 103–135.
30. Cecilia L. Allemandi, *Sirvientes, criados y nodrizas: Una historia del servicio doméstico en la ciudad de Buenos Aires (fines del siglo XIX y principios del XX)*, Historia (Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2017).
31. Belbey, “Sobre *travestissement*.”
32. Simonetto, *El dinero no es todo*.
33. José Belbey and Alfredo Zanchi, “Sobre *travestissement* (comentado),” *La semana médica*, no. 168 (1945): 122–145.
34. Belbey and Zanchi, “Sobre *travestissement* (comentado).”
35. Jonathan D. Ablard, “The Barracks Receives Spoiled Children and Returns Men”: Debating Military Service, Masculinity and Nation-Building in Argentina, 1901–1930,” *The Americas* 74, no. 3 (2017): 299–329.
36. Belbey, “Sobre *travestissement*.”
37. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires*; Simonetto, *El dinero no es todo*.
38. Ficha N5045, Dirección General de Institutos Penales, 1955.
39. Edwards, “Photography and the Material Performance of the Past.”
40. Rebekah Edwards, “‘This Is Not a Girl’: A Trans* Archival Reading,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2015): 650–665.
41. María Elena Martínez, “Archives, Bodies, and Imagination: The Case of Juana Aguilar and Queer Approaches to History, Sexuality, and Politics,”

Radical History Review 2014, no. 120 (2014): 159–182.

42. Fernández Galeano, “Running Mascara.”

43. Coleman, “The Photos That We Don’t Get to See.”

44. Photographic Collection, “Mujeres (?),” Museo Penitenciario Argentino Antonio Ballvé.

45. Lily Cho, “Anticipating Citizenship: Chinese Head Tax Photographs,” in *Feeling Photography*, edited by E. Brown and T. Phu, 158–180. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

46. Liga Patriótica was a far-right-wing nationalist group active in Argentina between 1918 and 1930. They became visible by attacking trade union demonstrations during the general strike of 1919 and the state repression called La Semana Trágica. They actively participated in the coup against Hipólito Irigoyen in 1930. See Sandra F. McGee, “The Visible and Invisible Liga Patriótica Argentina, 1919–28: Gender Roles and the Right Wing,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 64, no. 2 (1984): 233–258.

47. Gauchos were nomadic horsemen from mixed-raced backgrounds who inhabited the grasslands. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they were considered dangerous people from the lower classes who threatened private property, and they were portrayed as unproductive and uncivilized. In the late nineteenth century, the elites transformed gauchos into a major national symbol of national literature and folk culture.

48. Archivo de la Memoria Trans y Fieiras.

49. Belbey y Zanchi, “Sobre *travestissement* (comentado).”

50. Graciela Queirolo, *Mujeres en las oficinas: Trabajo, género y clase en el sector administrativo (Buenos Aires, 1910–1950)*, Colección Ciudadanía e inclusión (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2018).

51. Malva usually identified herself as a *marica*, or a female homosexual. She usually used female pronouns according to her self-chosen name, Malva Solís. As is shown in her collection of photographs, she migrated from male to female dressing and gender expression in her daily life.

52. Omar Acha, *Crónica sentimental de la Argentina peronista: Sexo, inconsciente e ideología, 1945–1955*, Prometeo bicentenario (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2014).

53. Malva, *Mi recordatorio*.

54. Malva, “El casamiento de Jorgelina,” *El teje*, no. 4 (2009).

55. Malva, *Mi recordatorio*.

56. Tossounian, *La Joven Moderna in Interwar Argentina*.

57. *CyC*, no. 102 (March 1, 1900); *CyC*, no. 226 (March 2, 1903); *CyC*, no. 501 (September 4, 1908); *CyC*, no. 572 (December 4, 1909); *CyC*, no. 2.047 (December 4, 1937); *Nación* 42, no. 14341 (May 13, 1911); *Crítica*, December 15, 1921, 2.

58. *Prensa* 50, no. 18093 (August 15, 1919): 17; *CyC*, no. 2.047 (December 2, 1937); *CyC*, no. 1.883 (November 3, 1934).
59. *CyC*, no. 1.722 (October 3, 1931).
60. *CyC*, no. 572 (February 4, 1909); *CyC*, no. 1.677 (November 22, 1930); *CyC*, no. 1.781 (November 9, 1932).
61. *CyC*, no. 1.019 (March 4, 1920): 4; *CyC*, no. 1.019 (September 4, 1920): 4.
62. *Cultura sexual y física*, year no. 1 (1937): n4, Buenos Aires, digital archive of CINIG-UNLP.
63. *CyC*, no. 1.781 (January 4, 1932); *CyC*, no. 1.227 (April 8, 1922); *CyC*, no. 2.123 (June 7, 1939).
64. Wayar, *Diccionario travesti de la T a la T*, 106.
65. Belbey and Zanchi, “Sobre *travestissement* (comentado).”
66. Lucas Disalvo, “Desfondar el ‘caso,’” *Moléculas Malucas*, November 23, 2020, <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/desfondar-el-caso>.
67. Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
68. Roberta Cowell, *Yo fui hombre (mi transformación de hombre a mujer)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Freeland, 1954).
69. Juan Pablo Queiróz, “Memorias del desvío,” *Moléculas Malucas*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/memorias-del-desvio>.
70. *Así*, November 27, 1964.
71. About the wrong-body narrative, read Ulrica Engdahl, “Wrong Body,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (May 1, 2014): 267–269, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2400226>; Emmett Harsin Drager and Lucas Platero, “At the Margins of Time and Place: Transsexuals and the Transvestites in Trans Studies,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (November 1, 2021): 417–425.
72. Milanesio, *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina*.
73. Ana Gabriela Alvarez, “Coccinelle: Entre el cabaret y la pantalla grande,” June 16, 2021, *Moléculas Malucas*, <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/coccinelle-entre-el-cabaret-y-la-pantalla>.
74. *Así*, September 12, 1962.
75. *Así*, October 25, 1961.
76. *Así*, February 17, 1963.
77. *Así*, September 29, 1963.
78. *Bombas*, n.d., Archivos Desviados, Buenos Aires.
79. *Así*, July 12, 1962.
80. Quijada et al., *El cambio de sexo*.

81. Fernanda Carvajal, “Image Politics and Disturbing Temporalities: On ‘Sex Change’ Operations in the Early Chilean Dictatorship,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2018): 621–637.
82. *La razón*, July 2, 1961.
83. *Así*, April 16, 1965.
84. *Crónica*, December 29, 1969.
85. Juan Pablo Queiróz, “La historia de nuestra historia,” *Moléculas Malucas*, August 19, 2021, <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/la-historia-de-nuestra-historia>.
86. *Así*, May 10, 1963.
87. *Así*, February 20, 1963.
88. *Así*, February 20, 1963.
89. Belbey and Zanchi, “Sobre *travestissement* (comentado).” As in the story of Juan, I use a fictional male name to mark the male expression of the patient—which was denied in the doctor’s writing.
90. Ramacciotti and Valobra, “El campo médico argentino y su mirada al tribadismo, 1936–1955.”
91. Belbey and Zanchi, “Sobre *travestissement* (comentado).” In the text they describe Pedro with female pronouns, which I counterbalance by describing him with male pronouns.
92. Ochoa, *Queen for a Day*.
93. *Así*, November 3, 1970.
94. Belbey, “La medicina legal sobre *travestissement*”; Belbey, “Sobre *travestissement*.”
95. *Crónica*, September 5, 1958.
96. *Así*, March 14, 1962.
97. *Así*, October 10, 1967.
98. *Así*, October 10, 1967.
99. *CyC*, no. 1.647 (April 26, 1930): 149; *CyC*, no. 1.693 (March 14, 1931): 113.
100. The reconstruction of Horacio’s life has been made based on the articles published in the magazines *Así*, *Crónica*, *La razón*, and *Popular* in 1970; *Así*, November 3, 1970.
101. *Así*, 3 November 1970.
102. Beccalossi, “Types, Norms, and Normalisation.”
103. Juan Lazarte, “Curso de sexología,” *Hombre de América* (1940): n4.
104. *Crónica*, November 12, 1970.
105. *Vea*, July 22, 1953.
106. Nerio Rojas (1890–1970) was an Argentine psychiatrist with a wide influence among doctors and state agents. He was head of the Legal Medicine Department (1924–1946) of Buenos Aires University, and in 1955 he was dean

of the medical faculty. He was three times deputy of the national parliament by the Radical Civic Union (1942–1943, 1946–1950, 1960–1962). He was also ambassador to UNESCO (1964–1966).

107. Nerio Rojas, “Hermafroditismo: Caso comentado,” *Archivos de psiquiatría, criminología y ciencias afines* 23, no. 102 (1937): 199–201.

108. Biernat, “Médicos, especialistas, políticos y funcionarios en la organización centralizada de la profilaxis de las enfermedades venéreas en la Argentina (1930–1954).”

109. *Nuestro mundo*, no. 4 (December 1, 1970): 3.

110. *Crónica*, November 5, 1970.

111. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 51–68.

112. *Así*, November 3, 1970.

113. *Crónica*, November 8, 1970.

114. *El popular*, June 4, 1970.

115. *Crónica*, November 15, 1970.

116. *Crónica*, November 6, 1970.

117. *Así*, November 3, 1970.

118. Anahi Farji Neer has studied the influence of medical and religious imagination on the regulation of transness in Argentina. Her pioneer work unpacked the making and effects of these discursive practices in Argentina. Read Anahí Farji Neer, *Travestismo, transexualidad y trasgeneridad en los discursos del Estado argentino: Desde los edictos policiales hasta la ley de identidad de género* (Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2017).

119. *La razón*, July 27, 1961, Archivo Desviado, Buenos Aires; *Así*, August 6, 1965.

120. *Así*, August 6, 1965.

121. *Así*, June 5, 1973.

122. *Así*, August 6, 1965.

123. *Crónica*, December 29, 1969.

124. *Crónica*, May 30, 1965.

125. Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press Books, 2014).

126. Simonetto, *El dinero no es todo*.

127. *Así*, May 4, 1965.

128. “Lesiones cambio de sexo,” *Revista de jurisprudencia* 8, no. 8 (1978): 600–608.

129. Jorge López Bolado, *Los médicos y el Código Penal: Responsabilidad penal, lesiones quirúrgicas y terapéuticas, eutanasia y eugenesia, abortos, cambio de sexo, trasplante de órganos, inseminación y fecundación artificial, uso de drogas prohibidas, certificados falsos, ejercicio ilegal de la medicina,*

abuso deshonesto, secreto profesional, inimputabilidad (Buenos Aires: Universidad, 1981).

130. *KA-BUUM*, no. 5, 1994. CeDInCI.

131. *Así*, May 7, 1965.

132. Gremio de Gastronómicos, Convenio Colectivo de Trabajo, Hoteleros y Afines, Buenos Aires, 1966.

133. *Crónica*, May 5, 1968.

134. “Jurisprudencia comentada ‘Cambio de sexo,’” *Revista de jurisprudencia* 4, no. 3 (1975): 15–35.

135. Manuel Orus, “Hermafroditismo, intersexualidad y transexualismo,” *Revista de jurisprudencia* 8, no. 8: 500–520.

136. Carlos Ayarragaray, “El cambio de sexo (A propósito de un fallo judicial),” *La ley*, no. 123: 1148–1158.

137. *Crónica*, March 18, 1968.

138. Roberto Teran Lomas, “La extirpación de organos sexuales en el derecho penal,” *Revista de jurisprudencia* 8, no. 8 (1978): 700–724.

139. “Lesiones cambio de sexo.”

140. Teran Lomas, “La extirpación de organos sexuales en el derecho penal.”

141. “Lesiones cambio de sexo.”

142. “N 12360, C. Críminal Capítal—Ricardo, San Martín” VII, no. 7 (1966): 473–500. 143. La mayoría, September 10, 1974.

144. *Crónica*, September 27, 1974.

145. *Crónica*, March 7, 1978.

146. “Jurisprudencia comentada ‘Cambio de sexo.’”

147. Gabriel Giorgi, *Sueños de exterminio: Homosexualidad y representación en la literatura argentina contemporánea*, 1st ed., Ensayos críticos 23 (Rosario, Argentina: B. Viterbo Editora, 2004).

CHAPTER 3. QUEENS IN THE THEATERS AND THE STREETS

1. Judith Gociol and Diego Rosemberg, *La historieta argentina: Una historia* (Buenos Aires: de la Flor, 2000).

2. The vedette is the main performer in a variety show.

3. Due to the comparatively higher wages and the universal education system, the Argentine cultural market was one of the biggest in the region. The demand for magazines and comics was extensive. Publications such as *Las locuras de Isidoro* reached more than 200,000 homes. See Martín Becerra, “Las noticias van al mercado: Etapas de intermediación de lo público en la historia de los medios de la Argentina,” *Intérpretes e interpretaciones de la Argentina en el bicentenario* 1 (2010): 139–165.

4. *Hybridation* is used here to identify the dynamic of multiple fusion and contact between the popular, the cultured, mass culture, technology, and the mythic, the combination of multiple temporalities and realities, an attempt to recognize the formulation of cultures of frontiers in the combination and dislocation of local and global meanings. See Néstor García Canclini, "Hybrid Cultures, Oblique Powers," *Media and Cultural Studies* 73 (2006): 422.
5. Ochoa, *Queen for a Day*; Thiago Barcelos Soliva, "Sobre o talento de ser fabulosa: Os 'shows de travesti' e a invenção da 'travesti profissional,'" *Cadernos Pagu*, no. 53 (2018).
6. P. J. DiPietro, "Decolonizing Travesti Space in Buenos Aires: Race, Sexuality, and Sideways Relationality," *Gender, Place & Culture* 23, no. 5 (2016): 677–693.
7. Fernández and Berkins, *La Berkins*.
8. Cutuli and Insausti, "Cabarets, corsos y teatros de revista."
9. About the racialization of travestis' identity, see Di Pietro, "Decolonizing travesti space in Buenos Aires."
10. Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946–1976*, vol. 64 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
11. Aldo Marchesi, *Latin America's Radical Left: Rebellion and Cold War in the Global 1960s*, vol. 107 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
12. Patricio Simonetto, "La moral institucionalizada: Reflexiones sobre el Estado, las sexualidades y la violencia en la Argentina del siglo XX," *e-l@tina: Revista electrónica de estudios latinoamericanos* 14, no. 55 (2016): 1–22.
13. Adamovsky, *Historia de la Argentina*.
14. Isabella Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia en los años sesenta: Una revolución discreta en Buenos Aires*, Historia y cultura (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2010); Karina Felitti, *La revolución de la píldora: Sexualidad y política en los sesenta*, 1st ed., Temas de la Argentina (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2012).
15. Valeria Manzano, *Age of Youth in Argentina*.
16. Lucia Cytryn, "Aventuras del tercer sexo: Les Girls en Buenos Aires," *Moléculas Malucas*, 2022, <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/aventuras-del-tercer-sexo>.
17. Les Girls International, *Valeria o travesti* (Rozenblit, 1966).
18. Fernando Noy, "DVD: Divina Valeria Divina," *Página/12*, June 17, 2011, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/soy/1-2013-2011-06-17.html>.
19. Así, August 11, 1971.
20. Cytryn, "Aventuras del tercer sexo."
21. Cytryn, "Aventuras del tercer sexo."

22. *Crónica*, September 21, 1971.
23. Lucia Cytryn, "Plumas, escándalo y calabozos," *Moléculas Malucas*, March 16, 2022, <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/plumas-escandalo-y-calabozos>.
24. *Así*, April 9, 1967.
25. *Crónica*, August 31, 1971.
26. Cytryn, "Aventuras del tercer sexo."
27. Claudia Wonder, *Olhares de Claudia Wonder: Crônicas e outras histórias* (São Paulo, SP: Edições GLS, 2008).
28. Website is at <https://sites.google.com/view/jorge-perez-evelyn>, and see Inés Moguillanes, "La historia silenciada de Evelyn," *Soy*, January 27, 2023; see also "Crónica, September 21, 1971, Buenos Aires."
29. *Confirmado*, April 24, 1974.
30. *El porteño*, 1988, Año VII, no. 84, Marcelo Ferreyra personal archive, Buenos Aires.
31. Green, *Beyond Carnival*, 370–379.
32. Noy, "DVD: Divina Valeria Divina."
33. Wonder, *Olhares de Claudia Wonder*.
34. *Clarín*, August 1, 1983.
35. *O lampião da esquina*, no. 32 (1981).
36. Alberto and Elena, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*.
37. Alberto, *Black Legend*.
38. *Así*, August 11, 1971.
39. Raanan Rein, "Challenging the Argentine Melting Pot: Peronism, Hispanidad, and Cultural Diversity," *Journal of Contemporary History* (2022), 002200942 11065994.
40. Alberto and Elena, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*.
41. DiPietro, "Decolonizing Travesti Emblem Space in Buenos Aires."
42. Ezequiel Adamovsky, "A Strange Emblem for a (Not So) White Nation: La Morocha Argentina in the Latin American Racial Context, c. 1900–2015," *Journal of Social History* 50, no. 2 (2016): 386–410.
43. Marcio Paschoal, *Rogéria, uma mulher e mais um pouco* (Rio de Janeiro: Estação Brasil, 2016).
44. Antonio Ladra and N. N. Argañaraz, *Gloria o el drama de la existencia: Recuerdos del travesti más viejo de América del Sur* (Montevideo: O dos, 1991).
45. Malva, *Mi recordatorio*.
46. Ezequiel Lozano, "Tramas artísticas del exilio sexual, entre Brasil y Argentina," *Badebec* 6, no. 12 (2017): 168–179.
47. Néstor Perlongher and Cecilia Palmeiro, *Correspondencia*, Campo real 12 (Buenos Aires: Mansalva, 2016).

48. Flash, 4 August, 1983.
49. Así, July 12, 1962.
50. Así, September 20, 1962.
51. *Bomba*, n.d., Archivos Desviados, Buenos Aires.
52. Vizgarra, Daniela, “Tacos en las tablas,” *El teje* 5 (2009): 18.
53. Flavio Rapisardi and Alejandro Modarelli, *Fiestas, baños y exilios: Los gays porteños en la última dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2001).
54. Santiago del Estero is a northern province of Argentina. In 1947 the national census counted 479,473 inhabitants.
55. Vanessa Show, *Es verdad Vanessa Show* (Buenos Aires: Escriba, 2012), 11–12, 24–28.
56. Wayar, *Furia travesti*, 32.
57. Mayka interview, December 5, 2021.
58. Así, May 12, 1972.
59. Show, *Es verdad Vanessa Show*.
60. “La vieja Vanesa,” *El teje*, no. 7 (2011).
61. Isabella Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia en los años sesenta*; Manzano, *Age of Youth in Argentina*.
62. Travestis usually use the term *exile* to define the need to travel abroad to work and to escape local repression. These exiles weren’t restricted to dictatorship.
63. Afiche, Madrid, 1980, Evelyn’s Archive, <https://sites.google.com/view/jorge-perez-evelyn>.
64. Show, *Es verdad Vanessa Show*, 2012, 86–87.
65. Show, *Es verdad Vanessa Show*, 2012, 53–58.
66. Archivo de la Memoria Trans y Fieiras, *Archivo de la Memoria Trans* (Buenos Aires: CHACO, 2020).
67. “El instinto sexual,” *El día médico* (1969): 435.
68. Así, April 3, 1971.
69. *Confirmado*, April 23, 1974.
70. *Última hora (matutino)*, September 7, 1975.
71. Así, May 12, 1973.
72. Wayar, *Furia travesti*, 64.
73. While *transsexual* referred to women seeking a genital gender-affirmation surgery, *mujer operada* referred to those who had already undergone a surgery.
74. Así, February 9, 1986.
75. Ezequiel Adamovsky, “Blackface minstrelsy en Buenos Aires: Las actuaciones de Albert Phillips en 1868 y las visitas de los Christy’s Minstrels en 1869, 1871 y 1873 (y una discusión sobre su impacto en la cultura local),” *Latin American Theatre Review* 55, no. 1 (2021): 5–26.

76. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, vol. 8 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Peter Burke, "Bakhtin for Historians," *Social History* 13, no. 1 (1988): 85–90.
77. Paula Bistagnino, "Memoria travesti-trans: "El Carnaval era el único momento de libertad"—Agencia Presentes," March 3, 2019, <https://agenciapresentes.org/2019/03/03/memoria-travesti-trans-el-carnaval-era-el-unico-momento-de-libertad/>.
78. Bistagnino, "Memoria travesti-trans."
79. Lohana Berkins, "Lentejuelas caídas en los carnavales de Salta," October 5, 2012, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/soy/1-2647-2012-10-05.html>.
80. De la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil*.
81. "Sociedad & Cultura," *El teje*, accessed June 25, 2021, <https://elteje.com/sociedad-cultura/la-vieja-vanesa>.
82. Malva, *Mi recordatorio*.
83. Malva, *Mi recordatorio*.
84. Trans Memory Archive, Malva Solís Collection, Photography, Montevideo 1952.
85. Trans Memory Archive, Malva Solís Collection, Los Elegantes flyer, FMS —48.
86. Trans Memory Archive, 1970, Mari Popi's collection, Carnival Studio.
87. Previous studies have shown that female travestis and trans women have often been expelled from their homes at an early age. A survey conducted in 2016 showed that 17 percent had left at younger than fifteen years old, and 49 percent between fifteen and eighteen years old. See Lohana Berkins and Josefina Fernández, "La gesta del nombre propio: Informe sobre la situación de la comunidad travesti en la Argentina," *Buenos Aires: Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, 2005.
88. Stephen Vider, *The Queerness of Home: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Domesticity after World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).
89. Lohana Berkins et al., *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas: Informe nacional sobre la situación de las travestis, transexuales y transgéneros* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 2015).
90. Berkins, "Lentejuelas caídas en los carnavales de Salta."
91. Fernández and Berkins, *La Berkins*.
92. Miguel Angel Cáseres, *El carnaval salteño: Preguntas y curiosidades*, Colección Ex libris (Salta, Argentina: Secretaría de la Cultura de la Provincia de Salta, Dirección General de Acción Cultural, 2008).
93. *El tribuno*, March 10, 1979, 9, Salta Capital.

94. Provincia de Buenos Aires, “Ley 8031 de 1973,” <http://www.gob.gba.gov.ar/legislacion/legislacion/d-8031.html>.
95. *El tribuno*, March 3, 1978, Salta Capital.
96. Luly interview, February 12, 2021.
97. Mary interview, May 31, 2021.
98. Wayar, *Diccionario travesti de la T a la T*.
99. Malva, *Mi recordatorio*.
100. “La Vieja Vanessa,” *El teje*, no. 7 (2011), 7 and 8.
101. Fernández and Berkins, *La Berkins*.
102. Lohana Berkins, “Un itinerario político del travestismo,” in *Sexualidades Migrantes: Género y Transgénero*, ed. D. Maffia, 127–137 (Buenos Aires: Feminaria, 2003).
103. Milanesio, *Destape*.
104. Fernández and Berkins, *La Berkins*.

CHAPTER 4. LIVING LABORATORIES

1. Don Kulick, *Travesti*; Annick Prieur, *La Casa de la Mema: Travestis, Locas y Machos* (México: Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género UNAM, 2014); Cutuli, “Maricas y travestis”; Alvarez, “Cuerpos Transitantes.”
2. Gabriela Cano, “Amelio Robles, andar de soldado viejo: Masculinidad (trangénero) en la Revolución Mexicana,” *Debate feminista* 39 (2009): 14–39; Skidmore, *True Sex*; Fernández Romero and Mendieta, “Toward a Trans* Masculine Genealogy in South America,” 524–534.
3. Eva Montes de Oca, *Guía negra de Buenos Aires: Marginación en la gran ciudad*, Colección Argentina hoy (Buenos Aires: Temas de Hoy, 1995), 98.
4. *Atención de la salud integral de personas trans, travestis y no binarias: Guía para equipos de salud* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Salud, 2020.) About Trucaje, read Marlen Wayar, “Furia Travesti,” 106.
5. Some of the ideas developed in this section grew out of a collaboration with Marce Joan Butierrez. I added endnotes to acknowledge and attribute shared ideas. See “To Show the Boobs: Protest, Obscenity and Eroticism in Travesti Protests during the Transition to Democracy in Argentina (1986–1998),” Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies Annual Conference 2021, Panel 38: Obscenity, Censorship, and Libidinal Politics in Latin America II (hereafter, “To Show the Boobs”).
6. I developed an analysis of travestis’ lives on the Pan-American Highway in collaboration with Marce Joan Butierrez. See Marce Joan Butierrez and Patricio Simonetto, “Las embajadoras de Travestilandia,” *Moléculas Malucas*, 2020.

7. Di Carlo Scotch, Cinthia “Deborah Singer,” Wikitrans, Archivo de la Memoria Trans. See <https://archivotrans.ar/index.php/wikitrans>.
8. Kulick’s ethnography about travestis in Brazil also shows that clients usually asked them to penetrate them. Kulick, *Travesti*.
9. *Eroticón*, Colección Grandes Temas No. 2: Amor entre hombres, 61–65 (Buenos Aires, 1986).
10. *Eroticón*, Colección Grandes Temas No. 2: Amor entre hombres, 61–65 (Buenos Aires, 1986).
11. *Crónica*, October 6, 1983.
12. Kulick, *Travesti*.
13. DiPietro, “Decolonizing Travesti Space in Buenos Aires.”
14. Débora D’Antonio, “Las sexy comedias en la filmografía argentina durante los años de la última dictadura militar argentina: Una lectura sobre el control y la censura,” in *Deseo y represión: Sexualidad, Género y Estado en la historia reciente argentina* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2015).
15. *Humor*, September 1987. CeDInCI.
16. *Humor*, January 1987. CeDInCI.
17. Jennifer Adair, *In Search of the Lost Decade: Everyday Rights in Post-Dictatorship Argentina* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).
18. Laura Masson, *La política en femenino: Género y poder en la Provincia de Buenos Aires*, 1st ed., Serie etnográfica (Buenos Aires: Centro de Antropología; Editorial Antropofagia, 2004).
19. Milanesio, *Destape*.
20. Wayar, *Diccionario travesti de la T a la T*, 75.
21. Mary interview, May 31, 2021.
22. Marcela interview, March 12, 2021.
23. Elyzabeth interview, April 12, 2021.
24. María Belén Correa, “Interviu 3, La lucha de una militante exiliada,” Interview Urbana Trans Documentales, video, 56:18, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le2EJRDEa-E&t=2519s&ab_channel=UrbanatransDocumentales. I also communicated with María Belén via email and social networks to discuss this, and requested her permission to refer to our conversations. Virtual communications with María Belén Correa, August 7, 2021, and November 5, 2023.
25. Álvarez, “Cuerpos Transistantes.”
26. Alberto and Elena, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, 2016.
27. Adamovsky, “Strange Emblem for a (Not So) White Nation.”
28. DiPietro, “Decolonizing Travesti Space in Buenos Aires.”
29. Some of these notes on the history of *piu-piu* appear in Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.”

30. Belén Correa, “Interviu 3, La lucha de una militante exiliada.” Also, virtual communication with María Belen Correa, August 7, 2021.
31. I developed some initial collaborative research about the history of silicone injection in collaboration with Marce Joan Butierrez. See Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.”
32. Wayar, *Furia travesti*; Archivo de la Memoria Trans y Fieiras, *Archivo de la Memoria Trans*.
33. Rizki, “Latin/x American Trans Studies.”
34. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, vol. 3 (New York: NYU Press, 2005).
35. Reuters, “Timeline: A Short History of Breast Implants,” January 26, 2012, sec. Healthcare & Pharma, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-implants-pip-idUSTRE80P12V20120126>.
36. D. Perry and J.D. Frame, “The History and Development of Breast Implants,” *Annals of The Royal College of Surgeons of England* 102, no. 7 (September 2020): 478–482, <https://doi.org/10.1308/rcsann.2020.0003>.
37. Reuters, “Timeline: A Short History of Breast Implants,”
38. Emilia Sanabria, *Plastic Bodies: Sex Hormones and Menstrual Suppression in Brazil*, Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
39. Luis Alberto Kvitko, “La situación del médico frente al tratamiento hormonal de travestis y transexuales: Consideraciones jurídicas, medicolegales y deontológicas,” *La semana médica* 161, no. 10 (1982): 350–358.
40. Mary interview, May 31, 2021.
41. Wayar, *Diccionario travesti de la T a la T*, 32. Part of the description in this paragraph emerges from my joint research with Marce Joan Butierrez. See Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.”
42. World Professional Association for Transgender Health, *Normas de atención para la salud de personas trans y con variabilidad de género* (USA: WPATH, 2020).
43. Fundación Huesped and Asociación Travestis Transexuales Transgéneros Argentina, *Ley de identidad de Género y acceso al cuidado de la salud de las personas trans en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Huesped, 2018).
44. El Conti, “Entrevista a Carolina Figueredo, integrante del Archivo de la Memoria Trans.”
45. Mary interview, May 31, 2021.
46. Fundación Huesped and Asociación Travestis Transexuales Transgéneros Argentina, *Ley de identidad de Género y acceso al cuidado de la salud de las personas trans en Argentina*.
47. *Clarín*, April 12, 1992.

48. *Esto!*, November 11, 1987.
49. This paragraph reflects my collaborative research with Marce Joan Butierrez about silicones and doctoras. See Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.”
50. *Crónica*, August 6, 1965.
51. *Crítica*, June 5, 1983.
52. *Ahora*, August 19, 1986.
53. Erika Denise Edwards, “The Making of a White Nation: The Disappearance of the Black Population in Argentina,” *History Compass* 16, no. 7 (2018): e12456, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12456>.
54. Patricio Simonetto, “The Club of the Four H’s: HIV/AIDS, Race, and Neoliberalism in Argentina,” *Nursing Clio*, May 4, 2021, <https://nursingclio.org/2021/05/04/the-club-of-the-four-hs-hiv-aids-race-and-neoliberalism-in-argentina/>.
55. This paragraph reflects my collaborative research with Marce Joan Butierrez about silicone. See Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.”
56. *Crónica*, February 10, 1989; *Clarín*, September 2, 1989.
57. *Esto!*, year 4 (September 15, 1989): 4.
58. Archivo de la Memoria Trans y Fieiras; Kulick, *Travesti*.
59. A description of this process was developed in Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.” See also Fernández and Berkins, *La Berkins*.
60. Aversa and Máximo, *Si te viera tu madre*.
61. A description of this process was developed in Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.”
62. A description of this process was developed in Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.”
63. Fernández and Berkins, *La Berkins*.
64. A description of this process was developed in Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.”
65. Ana Laura Carrozzo, *Material descartable: Relatos trans en las márgenes del sistema* (La Plata: UNLP, 2018).
66. Wayar, *Diccionario travesti de la T a la T*, 83.
67. Fernández and Lohana Berkins, *La Berkins*.
68. Fernández and Berkins, *La Berkins*.
69. Archivo de la Memoria Trans y Fieiras.
70. Luly interview, April 25, 2021.
71. Milena interview, April 24, 2021.
72. Fundación Huesped and Asociación Travestis Transexuales Transgéneros Argentina, *Ley de identidad de Género y acceso al cuidado de la salud de las personas trans en Argentina*.
73. *Fin de siglo* 13, July 1, 1988.

74. *Clarín*, April 12, 1992.
75. Montes de Oca, *Guía negra de Buenos Aires*.
76. Mary interview, May 31, 2021.
77. Adrian Helien, *Manual de atención de la salud transgénero* (Buenos Aires: Librería Akadia, 2021).
78. *Crónica*, July 3, 1978.
79. *Ahora*, November 23, 1985.
80. Adrian interview, June 18, 2021.
81. For a genealogy of trans masculinities, read Fernández Romero and Mendieta, "Toward a Trans* Masculine Genealogy in South America."
82. Eugenio oral history testimony, Archivo de la Memoria Trans clip, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=668248614442448>; Ramirez Pablo Amilcar, "TransMisión—Tercer encuentro con Eugenio Talbot," October 28, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oFlI2jTtCk&t=813s.
83. Victim Register, <http://basededatos.parquedelamemoria.org.ar/registros/8270/>.
84. Adair, *In Search of the Lost Decade*.
85. Ramirez Pablo Amilcar, "TransMisión—Tercer encuentro con Eugenio Talbot," October 28, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oFlI2jTtCk&t=1003s.
86. Alexis Oliva, "De clandestinidades y disidencias: Eugenio, varón trans e hijo de desaparecidxs," Agencia Presentes, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200323164839/https://agenciapresentes.org/2020/03/22/de-clandestinidades-y-disidencias-eugenio-varon-trans-e-hijo-de-desaparecidxs/>.
87. El Caudillo, "Acabar con los Homosexuales," February 12, 1975. Eugenio Talbot Wright highlighted the importance of this document in public interventions.
88. *Crónica*, September 27, 1974.
89. Eugenio oral history testimony, Archivo de la Memoria Trans clip, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=668248614442448>.
90. Eugenio oral history testimony, Archivo de la Memoria Trans clip, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=668248614442448>.
91. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*.
92. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*.
93. Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*.
94. This is something that he repeated in public interviews, such as in the Archivo de la Memoria Trans clip, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=668248614442448>; Alexis Oliva, "De clandestinidades y disidencias: Eugenio, varón trans e hijo de desaparecidxs," Agencia Presentes, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200323164839/>

<https://agenciapresentes.org/2020/03/22/de-clandestinidades-y-disidencias-eugenio-varon-trans-e-hijo-de-desaparecidxs/>.

95. Alexis Oliva, “De clandestinidades y disidencias: Eugenio, varón trans e hijo de desaparecidxs,” Agencia Presentes, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200323164839/https://agenciapresentes.org/2020/03/22/de-clandestinidades-y-disidencias-eugenio-varon-trans-e-hijo-de-desaparecidxs/>.

96. Mariela Castro Espin, “La educación sexual como política de Estado en Cuba desde 1959,” *Sexología y sociedad* 17, no. 45 (2011): 4–13.

97. Eugenio oral history testimony, Archivo de la Memoria Trans clip.

98. Diana Taylor, “Disappearing Acts,” in *Disappearing Acts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

99. Rita Segato, “La estructura de género y el mandato de violación,” in *Mujeres intelectuales: Feminismo y liberación en América Latina y el Caribe*, ed. Alejandra de Santiago, Edith Caballero, and Gabriela González (Buenos Aires: CLACAO): 2017, 299–332.

100. Eugenio oral history testimony, Archivo de la Memoria Trans clip, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=668248614442448>; Ramirez Pablo Amilcar, “TransMisión—Tercer encuentro con Eugenio Talbot,” October 28, 2020.

101. Gilda Veronica Ludmila Da Silva Catela and Eugenio Talbot Wright, “De-construyendo el pasado: Sobre la potencia política y las memorias al margen de la comunidad LGTB en Argentina,” *Caderno de Letras*, no. 37 (2020): 301–318.

102. Gilda Veronica Ludmila Da Silva Catela and Eugenio Talbot Wright, “De- construyendo el pasado: Sobre la potencia política y las memorias al margen de la comunidad LGTB en Argentina”; Eugenio oral history testimony, Archivo de la Memoria Trans clip, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=668248614442448>; Ramirez Pablo Amilcar, “TransMisión—Tercer encuentro con Eugenio Talbot,” October 28 2020.

103. Andre Cavalcante, “Breaking into Transgender Life: Transgender Audiences’ Experiences with ‘First of Its Kind’ Visibility in Popular Media,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 10, no. 3 (2017): 538–555.

104. *Las iguanas*, no. 1 (Córdoba, 1998), 3. CeDInCI.

105. Fernández Romero and Mendieta, “Toward a Trans* Masculine Genealogy in South America.”

106. *Las iguanas*, no. 4 (Córdoba, 1999), 4. CeDInCI.

107. Oliver Nash, *Siempre estuve ahí* (Buenos Aires: AGUILAR, 2022), 131.

108. Fundación Huesped and Asociación Travestis Transexuales Transgéneros Argentina, *Ley de identidad de Género y acceso al cuidado de la salud de las personas trans en Argentina*.

109. Estefania Santoro, “¿Por qué no se habla de los suicidios de varones trans?,” *Revista Crisis*, 2003, <https://revistacitrica.com/por-que-no-se-habla-de-los-suicidios-de-varones-trans-.html>.
110. Kalym interview, June 20, 2021.
111. Alexis Oliva, “De clandestinidades y disidencias: Eugenio, varón trans e hijo de desaparecidxs,” *Agencia Presentes*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200323164839/https://agenciapresentes.org/2020/03/22/de-clandestinidades-y-disidencias-eugenio-varon-trans-e-hijo-de-desaparecidxs/>.
112. *Las iguanas*, no. 5 (Córdoba, 1999), 4. CeDInCI.
113. Lohana Berkins, “Travestis: Una identidad política,” *Pensando los feminismos en Bolivia* (La Paz: Conexión Fondo de Emancipación, 2006, 20).
114. Wayar, *Furia travesti*, 32.
115. I am currently developing research in collaboration with Salvador Ortiz-Vidal about Lohana Berkins’s theoretical contribution to trans studies. See Salvador Vidal-Ortiz and Patricio Simonetto, “Lohana Berkins: Apuntes sobre la teoría encarnada travesti Latinoamericana,” in *Política, deliberação pública e organizações sociais na contemporaneidade*, ed. Antônio Carlos Sardinha, Delamar José Volpato Dutra, and Dilméia Rochana Tavares do Couto, 20–42 (Macapá: UNIFAP, 2021). I am thankful for his generosity and the opportunity to develop shared ideas.
116. “El legado: Un año sin amor,” *Pagina/12*, 1486078487, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/17777-el-legado>.
117. “Ágora 2.0—Lohana Berkins: Identidad en el siglo XXI,” Integración Taller, video, 26:19, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSm9cqJQsBg&t=578s&ab_channel=Integraci%C3%B3nTaller.
118. Marce Butierrez and Patricio Simonetto, “No Uterus, No Opinion? Travestis, Gays & Maricas’ Activism for the Abortion Legalization in Argentina,” *History Workshop*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/no-uterus-no-opinion/>.
119. Jones, “Entrevista con Lohana Berkins.”
120. Lohana Berkins “Travestis: Una identidad política,” *Hemispheric Institute*, https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-42/4-2-review-essays/lohana-berkins.html#_edn1.
121. Elizabeth interview, February 21, 2021.
122. Emma interview, May 14, 2021.
123. Kalym interview, June 17, 2021.
124. See, for example, Lohana Berkins, “Un itinerario político del travestismo.”

CHAPTER 5. THE CARNAL REVOLUTION

1. The Plaza de Mayo is a square between the center of government and the old *cabildo* city hall in Buenos Aires. It has been a center of political struggle since colonial times, from the Mayo revolt that started independence in 1810 to the human rights movements of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. It is the main political stage for Argentine demonstrations and political actions. See Silvia Sigal, *La Plaza de Mayo: Una crónica*, 1st ed., Metamorfosis (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2006).

2. This description reflects my coauthored research with Marce Joan Butierrez on the first travestis' demonstration. See Butierrez and Simonetto, "Las embajadoras de Travestilandia" and "To Show the Boobs."

3. *Libre*, December 23, 1983, Fondo Marcelo Ferreyra. CeDInCI.

4. *Crónica*, August 25, 1988.

5. Adair, *In Search of the Lost Decade*.

6. Milanesio, *Destape*.

7. This paragraph reflects collaborative research with Marce Joan Butierrez about breast politicization in post-dictatorial Argentina. See Butierrez and Simonetto, "To Show the Boobs" and "Las embajadoras de Travestilandia."

8. De la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil*; Ochoa, "La ciudadanía ingrata"; Vider, *Queerness of Home*.

9. Cristian Alarcon, "En busca de un príncipe salvador," Pagina/12. accessed June 7, 2022, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/1999/99-03/99-03-10/pag17.htm>.

10. Berkins, "Itinerario político del travestismo."

11. Aversa and Máximo, *Si te viera tu madre*, 143.

12. Ben, "Male Same-Sex Sexuality and the Argentine State, 1880–1930."

13. Gentili, *Me va a tener que acompañar*.

14. Buenos Aires Province, Law 8031/1955.

15. Formosa—Decreto/Ley No. 794/1979.

16. Santiago del Estero, Ley 6.906.

17. Trans Memory Archive, Magalí Muñiz's Collection, 1983, Park Portrait. <https://archivotrans.ar/index.php/catalogo/unidad/65>.

18. Los maricones (2017), CLADE, video, 30:12, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UulvcS31rxg&ab_channel=CLADE.

19. *El Caudillo* (Buenos Aires), "Acabar con los homosexuales," February 1975.

20. Wayar, *Diccionario travesti de la T a la T*.

21. "Ellos quieren ser ellas y no los dejan," *Esto!*, October 27, 1990.

22. "El desmembrado de Arrecife," *Esto!*, September 2, 1988.

23. "La gatita era un gatito," *Flash*, November 11, 1990.

24. Berkins et al., *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas*.

25. *Crónica*, October 6, 1988.

26. *Crónica*, September 7, 1988.
27. *Fin de siglo*, no. 13 (1987).
28. Ivana Tintilay, "Memorias de una cuarentena eterna," *Moléculas Malucas*, May 9, 2020, <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/memorias-de-una-cuarentena-eterna>.
29. *Crónica*, May 9, 1990.
30. This paragraph reflects my collaborative research with Marce Joan Butierrez about travestis' lives on the Pan-American Highway. See Butierrez and Simonetto, "Las embajadoras de travestilandia."
31. *Fin de siglo*, no. 13 (1987).
32. *Crónica*, September 24, 1989.
33. *Esto!*, September 2, 1988.
34. *Crónica*, May 1, 1988.
35. *Crónica*, August 15, 1987.
36. *Crónica*, August 26, 1988.
37. Julio César Caram, "Los travestis y la prostitución: Revelador ciclo de notas (1987)," video, 12:35, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9MUTrnAfnI&ab_channel=JulioC%C3%A9sarCaram.
38. Tintilay, "Memorias de una cuarentena eterna."
39. Historical Justice Department, Buenos Aires Province, Court of Peace, Berisso, L I, F781, Record C4459.
40. Historical Justice Department, Buenos Aires Province, Court of Peace, Berisso, L I, F34, Record C179.
41. Some of the ideas about breast politicization in this section grew out of my collaboration with Marce Joan Butierrez. I added endnotes to acknowledge and attribute shared ideas. See Butierrez and Patricio, "To Show the Boobs."
42. *Clarín*, February 13, 1987; *Esto!* (Buenos Aires), October 13, 1988.
43. Malva, *Mi recordatorio*.
44. Museo Penitenciario Argentino Antonio Ballvé, Photographic Collection, N/D.
45. Ariella Azoulay, "The Ethic of the Spectator: The Citizenry of Photography," *Afterimage* 33, no. 2 (2005): 38.
46. Fernández Galeano, "Running Mascara."
47. Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Series Q (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
48. Tintilay, "Yo nací, soy y moriré orgullosamente puta," *Moléculas Malucas*, December 10, 2021, <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/yo-naci-soy-y-morire-orgullosamente-puta>.
49. *Esto!*, March 3, 1987.
50. *Esto!*, March 3, 1987.
51. Wayar, *Diccionario travesti de la T a la T*.

52. Aversa and Máximo, *Si te viera tu madre*.
53. Mabel Bellucci, *Orgullo: Carlos Jáuregui, una biografía política* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2010).
54. A fragment of this text has been published in Spanish in the coauthored blog post with Marce Joan Butierrez entitled “Las embajadoras de Travestilandia.”
55. I reconstructed this demonstration in collaboration with Marce Joan Butierrez. This description is part of our coauthored blog post “Las embajadoras de Travestilandia.”
56. *Crónica*, March 20, 1987.
57. *Flash*, March 20, 1987.
58. This paragraph reflects collaborative research with Marce Joan Butierrez about breast politicization in postdictatorial Argentina. See Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs” and “Las embajadoras de Travestilandia.”
59. Acha, *Crónica sentimental de la Argentina peronista*.
60. This paragraph reflects my shared ideas with Marce Joan Butierrez about travesti activism and protest in postdictatorial times. See Butierrez Marce Joan and Patricio Simonetto “To Show the Boobs”
61. *Esto!*, October 2, 1982.
62. This paragraph reflects my shared ideas with Marce Joan Butierrez about the politicization of travestis’ breasts in Argentina. See Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.”
63. Alejandro Grimson, “Raza y clase en los orígenes del peronismo: Argentina, 1945,” *Desacatos*, no. 55 (2017): 110–127; Semán, *Breve historia del antipopulismo*.
64. Bellucci, *Orgullo*.
65. Bellucci, *Orgullo*.
66. Berkins, “Itinerario político del travestismo,” 2003.
67. Leaflet (July 1993) Marcelo Ferreyra. CeDInCI.
68. This paragraph reflects my collaborative research with Marce Joan Butierrez about topless protests. See Butierrez and Simonetto, “To Show the Boobs.”
69. “Otra de travestis,” *NX*, no. 31 (1996): 13.
70. “La comisaría 23 es un nido de delincuentes,” *NX* 3, no. 30 (1996): 9; “Travestis que querellan,” *Revista espejo de SIGLA* 3, no. 29 (1996): 12.
71. Wendy L. Rouse, *Public Faces, Secret Lives: A Queer History of the Women’s Suffrage Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2022).
72. *Crónista Comercial*, May 31, 1992, Marcelo Ferreyra’s Archive; Marce Butierrez, “Mujer se nace: Karina Urbina y el activismo transexual de los años 90,” *Moléculas Malucas*, 2021, <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/mujer-se-nace>.

73. *KA-BUUM*, no. 5 (1992).
74. *Crónica*, June 26, 1991.
75. *Crónista Comercial*, May 31, 1992. Marcelo Ferreyra's Archive.
76. Jauregui's Support Letter, March 3, 1992, M. Ferreyra's Archive.
77. I held an interview with Victoria Barreda on April 3, 2021, and also engaged with her in several virtual communications, all of which helped me reconstruct her perspective as a cisgender scholar on transsexual and travesti activism in the period of her collaboration with the group.
78. *Confidencial*, 12, 1993.
79. *La voz transexual*, no. 1 (1994), Archivos Desviados, Buenos Aires.
80. Biblioteca LGTBIQ Arg ArchivoPIETRO, "Yanina Moreno: Yo nunca fui travesti en Hola Susana con Ilse Fuskova—Travestis Transexuales," November 5, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCUo5ORBDJA>.
81. María Elena Oddone, "La Transexualidad," *El informador público*, year 5, no. 242 (May 17, 1991). CeDInCi.
82. Oddonne, "La Transexualidad."
83. *Crónica*, January 27, 1990.
84. *KA-BUUM*, no. 5 (1992).
85. Oddone, "La Transexualidad."
86. DiFilm, "Carlos Jauregui Karina Urbina y Fernando Petroni con Mariano Grondona (1992)," 2017, archivodichiara, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzoQ4uM6M48>.
87. I have worked in a more expanded analysis of Mariela Muñoz's activism with Johana Kunin. Both authors have authorised a partial reproduction of this analysis in this book. See Patricio Simonetto and Johana Kunin, "Mariela Muñoz: Citizenship, Motherhood, and Transsexual Politics in Argentina (1943–2017)," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (2021): 516–531.
88. The International Tribunal on Human Rights Violations Against Sexual Minorities, Tuesday, October 17, 1995, New York City, USA. <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/188-1.pdf>.
89. The International Tribunal on Human Rights Violations Against Sexual Minorities, Tuesday, October 17, 1995, New York City, USA. <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/188-1.pdf>.
90. Intelligence Police Department of Buenos Aires Province (DIPBA), Mesa DS, no. 35333.
91. The International Tribunal on Human Rights Violations Against Sexual Minorities, Tuesday, October 17, 1995, New York City, USA. <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/188-1.pdf>.
92. The International Tribunal on Human Rights Violations Against Sexual Minorities, Tuesday, October 17, 1995, New York City, USA. <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/188-1.pdf>

93. archivodichiara. 2015. “DiFilm—Mariela Muñoz—transsexual (1993).” YouTube, January 4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3A4R1R7RF4>.
94. The International Tribunal on Human Rights Violations Against Sexual Minorities, Tuesday, October 17, 1995, New York City, USA. <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/188-1.pdf>.
95. Amnesty International Argentina, “Los métodos de estimación del aborto inducido en Argentina: Cómo se llegó a la cifra de 450 mil,” 2020. <https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2016/09/Medici%C3%B3n-de-abortos-Clandestinos.pdf>.
96. Archivodichiara. “DiFilm—Mariela Muñoz—transexual (1993).” YouTube, January 4, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3A4R1R7RF4>.
97. DiFilm, “Mariela Muñoz—Transsexual (1993),” archivodichiara, January 4, 2015, video, 4:53, www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3A4R1R7RF4.
98. Rafael Fredda (pers. comm., July 27, 2020). Quoted in Patricio Simonetto and Johana Kunin, “Mariela Muñoz” (524).
99. Maria Luisa Peralta (pers. comm., August 20, 2020). Quoted in Simonetto and Kunin, “Mariela Muñoz” (526.).
100. *Las iguanas*, no. 1 (Córdoba, 1998). CeDInCI.
101. *Las iguanas*, no. 4 (Córdoba, 1999). CeDInCI.
102. Fernández Romero and Mendieta, “Toward a Trans* Masculine Genealogy in South America.”
103. Francisco Fernández Romero, “‘We Can Conceive Another History’: Trans Activism around Abortion Rights in Argentina,” *International Journal of Transgender Health* 22, no. 1–2 (2021): 126–140.
104. Mónica Petracci and Mario Pecheny, *Argentina: Derechos humanos y sexualidad* (CEDES/CLAM, 2007).
105. Petracci and Pecheny, *Argentina*.
106. Petracci and Pecheny, *Argentina*.
107. Petracci and Pecheny, *Argentina*.
108. Gustavo Green, Project “Regime for Physical Adaptation and Change of Civil Identity for Cases of Intersex and Transsexuality,” 1995, M. Ferreyra’s Archive.
109. Carolos Sanzol, *HEMBRA. Cris Miró. Vivir y morir en un país de machos* (Buenos Aires: Milena Caserola, 2016).
110. Gabriel, “Cris Miro en ‘Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand’ (Canal 9),” Gabriel MDQ, video, 4:03, <https://www.youtube.com/wavideo, ch?v=ywoEOBVKoFI>.
111. “Miro en ‘Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand’ (Canal 9),” Gabriel MDQ, accessed July 1, 2021, video, 4:03, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywoEOBVKoFI>.

112. “No tengo la culpa de ser inteligente,” *La Nacion*, October 27, 1996, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/no-tengo-la-culpa-de-ser-inteligente-nid202494/>.

113. Constanza Tabbush et al., “Matrimonio igualitario, identidad de género y disputas por el derecho al aborto en Argentina: La política sexual durante el kirchnerismo (2003–2015),” *Sexualidad, salud y sociedad (Rio de Janeiro)*, no. 22 (April 2016): 22–55, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-6487.sess.2016.22.02.a>.

114. Fernández Romero and Mendieta, “Toward a Trans* Masculine Genealogy in South America.”

115. Fernández Romero and Mendieta, “Toward a Trans* Masculine Genealogy in South America.”

116. Francisco Fernández Romero, “‘We Can Conceive Another History’: Trans Activism around Abortion Rights in Argentina,” *International Journal of Transgender Health*, Vol 22, Issue 1–2, 2021, 126–140.

117. Blas Radi, “El reloj político de los derechos sexuales y reproductivos,” *Sociales en debate* 14 (2018): 1–5.

118. The organizations that participated in the front were ALITT, Cooperativa “Nadia Echazú,” Hombres Trans Argentinos, Movimiento Antidiscriminatorio de Liberación (MAL), Futuro Trans, Encuentro por la Diversidad (Córdoba), MISER, Antroposex, Viudas de Perlongher, Jóvenes por la Diversidad, Escénika Arte y Diversidad, Cero en Conducta (Santiago del Estero), ADISTAR-Salta, Comunidad Homosexual Argentina, Apid, Crisálida (Tucumán), Ave Fénix, AMMAR Córdoba, and independent activists, among others. In “Toward a Trans* Masculine Genealogy in South America,” Francisco Fernández Romero and Andres Mendieta note that even if the role of trans women and travestis are most often credited with passage of the law, many activists, such as Cabral Grinspan, Blas Radi, Taddeo C. C., and Fernando Rodríguez (among others), played a vital role in it, too.

119. *Yogyakarta Principles: The Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* (Yogyakarta: Yogyakarta Principles, 2007.)

120. Lohana Berkins, “Los existenciaros trans,” in *La diferencia desquiciada: Géneros y diversidades sexuales*, ed. Ana María Fernández and William Sequeira Péres. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2013.

121. Televisión Pública Noticias, “Alberto Fernández entregó a Isha Escribano el DNI 9 mil con identidad autopercibida,” #TPANoticias, video, 26:22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeP8vvKCXeg>.

122. RENAPER (Registro Nacional de Personas). Casi Nueve Mil Personas Cambiaron Su Identidad de Género. 2020. Updated information may be found at

https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/2_cambio_identidad_de_genero_mayo2020_dnp_renaper.pdf.

123. “Todes, es con DNI,” LatFem, November 20, 2020, <https://latfem.org/todes-es-con-dni/>.

124. Jones, “Entrevista con Lohana Berkins.”

125. Butierrez and Simonetto. “No Uterus, No Opinion?”

EPILOGUE

1. TÉLAM, “Detienen a un falso cirujano mientras realizaba una intervención en un consultorio clandestino,” January 7, 2022, <https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/202201/580258-detiene-a-un-falso-cirujano-mientras-realizaba-una-intervencion-en-un-consultorio-clandestino.html>.

2. ATE, “¿Qué pasa con el Cupo Laboral Travesti-Trans en el Estado Nacional a un año de la Ley?” <https://ate.org.ar/que-pasa-con-el-cupo-laboral-travesti-trans-en-el-estado-nacional-a-un-ano-de-la-ley/>, 11 de julio de 2022. <https://ate.org.ar/que-pasa-con-el-cupo-laboral-travesti-trans-en-el-estado-nacional-a-un-ano-de-la-ley/>.

3. Alba Rueda interview September 6, 2021.

4. Jones, “Entrevista con Lohana Berkins.”

5. Alba Rueda, “Aportes del movimiento travesti-trans a las políticas decoloniales en América del Sur; Wayar, *Travesti*.

6. María José Correa, “Temor y fascinación: El veneno en la imaginación urbana: Chile, 1880–1920,” *História unisinos* 23, no. 2 (2019): 167–179.

7. Archivo de la Memoria Trans y Fieiras.

8. Mayka interview, January 5, 2021.

9. Rizki, “No State Apparatus Goes to Bed Genocidal Then Wakes Up Democratic.”

10. Wayar, *Furia Travesti*.

11. Insausti, “Los cuatrocientos homosexuales desaparecidos.”

12. A good example of body-building history is Lynn M. Thomas, *Beneath the Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners*, Theory in Forms (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

Bibliography

- Ablard, Jonathan D. "The Barracks Receives Spoiled Children and Returns Men": Debating Military Service, Masculinity and Nation-Building in Argentina, 1901–1930." *The Americas* 74, no. 3 (2017): 299–329.
- Acha, Omar. "Crónica sentimental de la Argentina peronista: Sexo, inconsciente e ideología, 1945–1955." *Prometeo bicentenario*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2014.
- Acha, Omar, and Pablo Ben. "Amorales, patoteros, chongos y pitucos: La homosexualidad masculina durante el primer peronismo [Buenos Aires, 1943–1955]." *Trabajos y comunicaciones*, no. 30–31 (2004): 1–42.
- Adair, Jennifer. *In Search of the Lost Decade: Everyday Rights in Post-Dictatorship Argentina*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019.
- Adamovsky, Ezequiel. "Blackface minstrelsy en Buenos Aires: Las actuaciones de Albert Phillips en 1868 y las visitas de los Christy's Minstrels en 1869, 1871 y 1873 (y una discusión sobre su impacto en la cultura local)." *Latin American Theatre Review* 55, no. 1 (2021): 5–26.
- Adamovsky, Ezequiel. *Historia de la Argentina: Biografía de un país: Desde la conquista española hasta nuestros días*. 1st ed. Buenos Aires: Crítica, 2020.
- Adamovsky, Ezequiel. "A Strange Emblem for a (Not So) White Nation: La Morocha Argentina in the Latin American Racial Context, c. 1900–2015." *Journal of Social History* 50, no. 2 (2016): 386–410.
- Aizura, Aren Z. *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Alarcon, Cristian. "En busca de un príncipe salvador." Página/12. Accessed June 7, 2022. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/1999/99-03/99-03-10/pag17.htm>.
- Alberto, Paulina L. *Black Legend: The Many Lives of Raúl Grigera and the Power of Racial Storytelling in Argentina*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- Alberto, Paulina, and Eduardo Elena. *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Allemandi, Cecilia L. *Sirvientes, criados y nodrizas: Una historia del servicio doméstico en la ciudad de Buenos Aires (fines del siglo XIX y principios del XX)*. Historia. Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2017.

- Alvarez, Ana Gabriela. "Coccinelle: Entre el cabaret y la pantalla grande." June 16, 2021. <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/coccinelle-entre-el-cabaret-y-la-pantalla>.
- Alvarez, Ana Gabriela. "Cuerpos transitantes: Para una historia de las identidades travesti-trans en la Argentina." *AVA* 1, no. 1 (2019): 45–71.
- Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London and New York: Verso, 2016.
- Armus, Diego. *The Ailing City: Health, Tuberculosis, and Culture in Buenos Aires, 1870–1950*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- ATE. "¿Qué pasa con el Cupo Laboral Travesti-Trans en el Estado Nacional a un año de la Ley?" <https://ate.org.ar/que-pasa-con-el-cupo-laboral-travesti-trans-en-el-estado-nacional-a-un-ano-de-la-ley/>, 11 de julio de 2022. <https://ate.org.ar/que-pasa-con-el-cupo-laboral-travesti-trans-en-el-estado-nacional-a-un-ano-de-la-ley/>.
- Atención de la salud integral de personas trans, travestis y no binarias. Guía para equipos de salud*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Salud, 2020.
- Aversa, María Marta, and Matías Máximo. *Si te viera tu madre: Activismos y andanzas de Claudia Pía Baudracco*. La Plata: UNLP, 2021.
- Ayarragaray, Carlos. "El cambio de sexo (A propósito de un fallo judicial)." *La Ley*, no. 123 (1966): 1148–1158.
- Azoulay, Ariella. *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*. London: Verso Books, 2015.
- Azoulay, Ariella. "The Ethic of the Spectator: The Citizenry of Photography." *Afterimage* 33, no. 2 (2005): 38.
- Bakker, Alex et al. *Others of My Kind: Transatlantic Transgender Histories*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2020.
- Bao, Daniel. "Invertidos Sexuales, Tortilleras, and Maricas Machos: The Construction of Homosexuality in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1900–1950." *Journal of Homosexuality* 24, no. 3–4 (1993): 183–220.
- Barrancos, Dora. "Mujeres en la Argentina: Un balance frente al Bicentenario." *Revista de trabajo* 6, no. 8 (2010): 323–331.
- Barrancos, Dora. "Problematic Modernity: Gender, Sexuality, and Reproduction in Twentieth-Century Argentina." *Journal of Women's History* 18, no. 2 (2006): 123–150.
- Bauer, Heike, Melina Pappademos, Katie Sutton, and Jennifer Tucker. "Visual Histories of Sex: Collecting, Curating, Archiving." *Radical History Review* 2022, no. 142 (January 21, 2022): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-9397002>.
- Bazán, Osvaldo. *Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina: De la conquista de América al siglo XXI*. Vol. 1. Buenos Aires: Marea Editorial, 2006.

- Bazán, Osvaldo. *Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina: De la conquista de América al siglo XXI*. 4th ed. Buenos Aires: Marea Editorial, 2016.
- Beccalossi, Chiara. "Types, Norms, and Normalisation: Hormone Research and Treatments in Italy, Argentina, and Brazil, c. 1900–50." *History of the Human Sciences* 34, no. 2 (2021): 113–137.
- Becerra, Martín. "Las noticias van al mercado: Etapas de intermediación de lo público en la historia de los medios de la Argentina." *Intérpretes e interpretaciones de la Argentina en el bicentenario* 1 (2010): 139–65.
- Belbey, José. "La medicina legal sobre *travestissement*." *La semana médica*, no. 23 (1955): 123–144.
- Belbey, José. "Sobre *travestissement*." *Archivo de medicina legal* IV (1944): 103–135.
- Belbey, José, and Alfredo Zanchi. "Sobre *travestissement* (comentado)." *La semana médica*, no. 168 (1945): 122–145.
- Bellucci, Mabel. *Orgullo: Carlos Jáuregui, una biografía política*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2010.
- Bembo, Marcos. *La mala vida en Barcelona*. Barcelona: Manucci, 1912.
- Ben, Pablo. "Male Same-Sex Sexuality and the Argentine State, 1880–1930." In *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America: A Reader on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights*, edited by Javier Corrales and Mario Pecheny, 33–43. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.
- Ben, Pablo. "Male Sexuality, the Popular Classes and the State: Buenos Aires, 1880–1955." PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2009.
- Ben, Pablo. "Muéstrame tus genitales y te diré quién eres: El hermafroditismo en la Argentina finisecular y de principios del siglo XX." In *Cuerpos, géneros e identidades, Buenos Aires, edited by Omar Acha and Paula Halperin*, 61–104. Buenos Aires: Ediciones el Siglo, 2000.
- Ben, Pablo. "Plebeian Masculinity and Sexual Comedy in Buenos Aires, 1880–1930." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 3 (2007): 436–458.
- Ben, Pablo, and Santiago Joaquín Insausti. "Dictatorial Rule and Sexual Politics in Argentina: The Case of the Frente de Liberación Homosexual, 1967–1976." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (2017): 297–325.
- Berkins, Lohana. "Los existenciarios trans." In *La diferencia desquiciada: Géneros y diversidades sexuales*, edited by Ana María Fernández and William Sequeira Pérez, 21–25. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2013.
- Berkins, Lohana. "Un itinerario político del travestismo." In *Sexualidades migrantes: Género y transgénero*, edited by D. Maffía, 127–137. Buenos Aires: Feminaria, 2003.

- Berkins, Lohana. "Lentejuelas caídas en los carnavales de Salta." *Soy*, October 5, 2012, Buenos Aires.
- Berkins, Lohana. "Travestis: Una identidad política." Hemispheric Institute, 2006. https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-42/4-2-review-essays/lohana-berkins.html#_edn1.
- Berkins, Lohana, and Josefina Fernández. *La gesta del nombre propio: Informe sobre la situación de la comunidad travesti en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 2005.
- Berkins, Lohana, Renata Hiller, Aluminé Moreno, and Ana Mallimaci. *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas: Informe nacional sobre la situación de las travestis, transexuales y transgéneros*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 2015.
- Berkins, Lohana. "Travestis: Una identidad política." In *Pensando los feminismos en Bolivia*. La Paz: Conexión Fondo de Emancipación, 2006.
- Biernat, Carolina. "Médicos, especialistas, políticos y funcionarios en la organización centralizada de la profilaxis de las enfermedades venéreas en la Argentina (1930–1954)." *Anuario de estudios americanos* 64, no. 1 (2007): 257–288.
- Biernat, Carolina, and KarinaInés Ramacciotti. *Crece y multiplicarse: La política sanitaria materno-infantil: Argentina 1900-1960*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2013.
- Bistagnino, Paula. "Memoria travesti-trans: 'El Carnaval era el único momento de libertad'—Agencia Presentes." March 3, 2019. <https://agenciapresentes.org/2019/03/03/memoria-travesti-trans-el-carnaval-era-el-unico-momento-de-libertad/>.
- Boag, Peter. "Go West Young Man, Go East Young Woman: Searching for the Trans in Western Gender History." *Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2005): 477–97.
- Bullough, Vern L. "Transsexualism in History." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 4, no. 5 (1975): 561–571.
- Butierrez, Marce. "Mujer se nace: Karina Urbina y el activismo transexual de los años 90." *Moléculas Malucas*, 2021. <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/mujer-se-nace>.
- Butierrez, Marce, and Patricio Simonetto. "Las embajadoras de Travestilandia." *Moléculas Malucas*, 2020. <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/las-embajadoras-de-travestilandia>.
- Butierrez, Marce, and Patricio Simonetto. "No Uterus, No Opinion? Travestis, Gays and Maricas' Activism for the Abortion Legalization in Argentina." February 10, 2021. <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/no-uterus-no-opinion/>.

- Butierrez, Marce, and Patricio Simonetto. "To Show the Boobs: Protest, Obscenity and Eroticism in Travestis' Protests during the Transition to Democracy in Argentina (1986–1998)." Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies Annual Conference 2021, Panel 38: Obscenity, Censorship, and Libidinal Politics in Latin America II.
- Cabral, Mauro. "Cissexual." *Página 12*, June 5, 2009, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/soy/1-803-2009-06-05.html>.
- Cabral, Mauro, and Gabriel Benzur. "Cuando digo intersex: Un diálogo introductorio a la intersexualidad." *Cadernos Pagu*, no. 24 (2005): 283–304.
- Cabral Grinspan, Mauro. "De monstruos conjurando: Intersexualidad y biotecnologías de la identidad." PhD thesis, University of Cordoba, 2006.
- Canaday, Margot. *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Canclini, Néstor García. "Hybrid Cultures, Oblique Powers." *Media and Cultural Studies* 73 (2006): 422.
- Cano, Gabriela. "Amelio Robles, andar de soldado viejo. Masculinidad (trangénero) en la Revolución Mexicana." *Debate feminista* 39 (2009): 14–39.
- Caro, Felipe. "Más allá de Stonewall: El Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual de Colombia y las redes de activismo internacional, 1976-1989." *Historia Crítica*, no. 75 (2020): 93–114.
- Carrozzo, Ana Laura. *Material descartable: Relatos trans en las márgenes del sistema*. La Plata: UNLP, 2018.
- Carvajal, Fernanda. "Image Politics and Disturbing Temporalities: On "Sex Change" Operations in the Early Chilean Dictatorship." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2018): 621–637.
- Cáseres, Miguel Angel. *El carnaval salteño: Preguntas y curiosidades. Colección Ex libris*. Salta, Argentina: Secretaría de la Cultura de la Provincia de Salta, Dirección General de Acción Cultural, 2008.
- Castillo, José González. *Los invertidos*. Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1991.
- Castro Espin, Mariela. "La educación sexual como política de Estado en Cuba desde 1959." *Sexología y sociedad* 17, no. 45 (2011): 4–13.
- Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940*. New York: Basic Books, 2019.
- Cho, Lily. "Anticipating Citizenship: Chinese Head Tax Photographs." In *Feeling Photography*, edited by E. Brown and T. Phu, 158–180. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Cho, Lily. "Intimacy among Strangers: Anticipating Citizenship in Chinese Head Tax Photographs." *Interventions* 15, no. 1 (2013): 10–23.

- Cleminson, Richard, and García, Francisco Vázquez. *Hermaphroditism, Medical Science and Sexual Identity in Spain, 1850-1960*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009.
- Coleman, Kevin. "The Photos That We Don't Get to See: Sovereignities, Archives, and the 1928 Massacre of Banana Workers in Colombia." In *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism*, edited by Daniel E. Bender and Jana K. Lipmn, 104–133. New York: New York University Press, 2015.
- Cordero, Laura Fernández. "Una avalancha de obras dedicadas al sexo: Revistas de las izquierdas argentinas en la primera mitad del siglo XX." *Caderno de letras*, no. 39 (2021): 93–109.
- Cordero, Osvaldo Sosa. *Historia de las varietés en Buenos Aires (1900-1925)*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1978.
- Correa, María José. "Temor y fascinación: El veneno en la imaginación urbana: Chile, 1880-1920." *História unisinos* 23, no. 2 (2019): 167–179.
- Cosse, Isabella. *Pareja, sexualidad y familia en los años sesenta: Una revolución discreta en Buenos Aires*. Historia y cultura. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2010.
- Cowan, Benjamin. *Securing Sex: Morality and Repression in the Making of Cold War Brazil*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2016.
- Cowell, Roberta. *Yo fui hombre (mi transformación de hombre a mujer)*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Freeland, 1954.
- Cutuli, María Soledad. "Maricas y travestis: Repensando experiencias compartidas." *Sociedad y economía*, no. 24 (2013): 183–206.
- Cutuli, María Soledad. "Travesti associations, state policies, and NGOs: Resistance and collective action in Buenos Aires, Argentina." *Sexualities* 18, no. 3 (2015): 297–309.
- Cutuli, María Soledad, and Santiago Insausti. "Cabarets, corsos y teatros de revista: Espacios de transgresión y celebración en la memoria marica." *Memorias, identidades y experiencias trans: (In)visibilidades entre Argentina y España*. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2015.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Series Q. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Cytryn, Lucia. "Aventuras del tercer sexo: Les Girls en Buenos Aires." Moléculas Malucas, 2022.
<https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/aventuras-del-tercer-sexo>.
- Cytryn, Lucia. "Plumas, escándalo y calabozos." Moléculas Malucas, March 16, 2022. <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/plumas-escandalo-y-calabozos>.
- Da Gris, Carlos. *El homosexual en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Continental Service, 1965.

- Da Silva Catela, Gilda Veronica Ludmila, and Eugenio Talbot Wright. "De-construyendo el pasado: Sobre la potencia política y las memorias al margen de la comunidad LGTB en Argentina." *Caderno de letras*, no. 37 (2020): 301–318.
- D'Antonio, Débora. "Las sexy comedias en la filmografía argentina durante los años de la última dictadura militar argentina: Una lectura sobre el control y la censura." In *Deseo y represión: Sexualidad, Género y Estado en la historia reciente argentina*, compiled by Débora D'Antonio. Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2015.
- De la Dehesa, Rafael. *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Dellepiane, Antonio. *El idioma del delito*. Buenos Aires: Arnoldo Moen, 1894.
- Dellepiane, Antonio. *El idioma del delito y diccionario lunfardo*. Buenos Aires: Fabril, 1967.
- DeVun, Leah, and Zeb Tortorici. "Trans, Time, and History." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2018): 518–539.
- DiPietro, P. J. "Decolonizing Travesti Space in Buenos Aires: Race, Sexuality, and Sideways Relationality." *Gender, Place & Culture* 23, no. 5 (2016): 677–693.
- Disalvo, Lucas. "Desfondar el 'caso.'" November 23, 2020. Moléculas Malucas. <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/desfondar-el-caso>.
- Edwards, Elizabeth. "Photography and the Material Performance of the Past." *History and Theory* 48, no. 4, 2009, 130–150.
- Edwards, Erika Denise. "The Making of a White Nation: The Disappearance of the Black Population in Argentina." *History Compass* 16, no. 7 (2018): e12456. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12456>.
- Edwards, Rebekah. "'This Is Not a Girl': A Trans* Archival Reading." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2015): 650–665.
- Engdahl, Ulrica. "Wrong Body." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (May 1, 2014): 267–269. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2400226>.
- Enke, Finn. "Transgender History (and otherwise Approaches to Queer Embodiment)." In *The Routledge History of Queer America*, edited by Don Romesburg (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 224–236.
- Farji Neer, Anahí. *Travestismo, transexualidad y trasgeneridad en los discursos del Estado argentino: Desde los edictos policiales hasta la ley de identidad de género*. Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2017.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012.
- Felitti, Karina. *La revolución de la píldora: Sexualidad y política en los sesenta*. 1st ed. Temas de la Argentina. Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2012.

- Fernández, Josefina, and Lohana Berkins. *La Berkins: Una combatiente de frontera*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2020.
- Fernández Romero, Francisco. “‘We Can Conceive Another History’: Trans Activism around Abortion Rights in Argentina.” *International Journal of Transgender Health* 22, no. 1-2 (2021): 126–140.
- Fernández Romero, Francisco, and Andrés Mendieta. “Toward a Trans* Masculine Genealogy in South America.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (2022): 524–534.
- Figari, Carlos. *Eróticas de la disidencia en América Latina: Brasil, siglos XVII al XX*. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2009.
- Figari, Carlos. “La invención de la sexualidad: El homosexual en la medicina argentina (1880–1930).” In *La producción de la sexualidad: Políticas y regulaciones sexuales en Argentina*, edited by Daniel Jones, Carlos Figari, and Sara Barrón López. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2012.
- Fuechtner, Veronika Douglas E. Haynes, and Ryan M. Jones. *A Global History of Sexual Science, 1880–1960*, vol. 26. California: University of California Press, 2017.
- Fundación Huesped and Asociación Travestis Transexuales Transgéneros Argentina. *Ley de Identidad de Género y acceso al cuidado de la salud de las personas trans en Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Fundación Huesped, 2018.
- Gago, Verónica, and Liz Mason-Deese. *Feminist International: How to Change Everything*. London: Verso, 2020.
- Galeano, Diego, and Cristiana Schettini. “Una historia verosímil de la princesa Borbón: Trabajo, género y sexualidad en América del Sur, 1905–1919.” In *Trabajos y trabajadores en América Latina (siglos XVI–XXI)*, Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. La Paz, 2019.
- Galeano, Javier Fernández. “Cartas desde Buenos Aires: El movimiento homosexual argentino desde una perspectiva transnacional.” *Latin American Research Review* 54, no. 3 (2019): 608–622.
- Galeano, Javier Fernández. “Running Mascara: The Hermeneutics of Trans Visual Archives in Late Franco-Era Spain.” *Radical History Review* 2022, no. 142 (2022): 72–92.
- Gayol, Sandra. *Sociabilidad en Buenos Aires: Hombres, honor y cafés, 1862–1910*. Ediciones del signo, 2000.
- Gentili, Rafael Amadeo. *Me va a tener que acompañar: Una visión crítica sobre los edictos policiales*. Buenos Aires: El Naranjo, 1995.
- Gill-Peterson, Jules. “The Cis State II.” Substack newsletter. Sad Brown Girl (blog). June 3, 2022. <https://sadbrowngirl.substack.com/p/the-cis-state-ii>.
- Gill-Peterson, Jules. *Histories of the Transgender Child*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

- Giorgi, Gabriel. *Sueños de exterminio: Homosexualidad y representación en la literatura argentina contemporánea*, 1st ed. Ensayos críticos 23. Rosario, Argentina: B. Viterbo Editora, 2004.
- Gociol, Judith, and Diego Rosemberg. *La historieta argentina: Una historia*. Buenos Aires: Dela Flor, 2000.
- Gómez, Ernesto. *La mala vida en Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: J. Roldan, 1908.
- Green, James N. *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Grimson, Alejandro. "Raza y clase en los orígenes del peronismo: Argentina, 1945." *Desacatos*, no. 55 (2017): 110–127.
- Guerrero McManus, Siobhan Fenella, and Leah Muñoz Contreras, "Epistemologías transfeministas e identidad de género en la infancia: Del esencialismo al sujeto del saber." *Revista interdisciplinaria de estudios de género de el Colegio de México* 4 (2018): 12.
- Guy, Donna J. *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina*. Vol. 1. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.
- Guy, Donna J. *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880–1955*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009.
- Halaburda, Carlos Gustavo. "Lunfardos: Queerness, Social Prophylaxis, and the Futures of Reproduction in Fin-de-Siècle Argentine Dramaturgy." *Latin American Theatre Review* 54, no. 2 (2021): 119–143.
- Halberstam, Jack. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. Vol. 3. New York: NYU Press, 2005.
- Halperin, David M. *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Harsin Drager, Emmett, and Lucas Platero. "At the Margins of Time and Place: Transsexuals and the Transvestites in Trans Studies." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (November 1, 2021): 417–425.
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments—Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*. London: Profile Books, 2019.
- Hausman, Bernice L. *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Helien, Adrian. *Manual de atención de la salud transgénero*. Buenos Aires: Librería Akadia, 2021.
- Hope Cleves, Rachel. "Six Ways of Looking at a Trans Man? The Life of Frank Shimer (1826–1901)." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 27, no. 1 (2018): 32–62.

- Huret, Jules. *En Argentine: De la Plata à la Cordillère des Andes, avec une carte de la République Argentine*. Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1913.
- Ingenieros, José. “La vanidad criminal.” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines*, no. 3 (1906): 14–23.
- Insausti, Santiago Joaquín. “Los cuatrocientos homosexuales desaparecidos: Memorias de la represión estatal a las sexualidades disidentes en Argentina.” In *Deseo y represión: Sexualidad, Género y Estado en la historia argentina reciente*, edited by Débora D’Antonio, 63–82. Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2015.
- Insausti, Santiago Joaquín. “Selva, plumas y desconche: Un análisis de las performances masculinas de la feminidad entre las locas del Tigre durante la década del ochenta.” *Revista latinoamericana de estudios sobre cuerpos, emociones y sociedad* 3, no. 7 (2011): 29–42.
- Ivana, Tintilay. “Memorias de una cuarentena eterna.” *Moléculas Malucas*, May 9, 2020. <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/memorias-de-una-cuarentena-eterna>.
- James, Daniel. *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976*. Vol. 64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Jones, Daniel. “Entrevista con Lohana Berkins.” *CLAM* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1–20.
- “Jurisprudencia comentada ‘Cambio de sexo.’” *Revista de jurisprudencia* 4, no. 3 (1975): 15–35.
- Kaczan, Gisela Paola. “La práctica gimnástica y el deporte, la cultura física y el cuerpo bello en la historia de las mujeres: Argentina 1900-1930.” *Historia crítica*, no. 61 (2016): 23–43.
- Karush, Matthew B. *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920–1946*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.
- Kerr, Ashley Elizabeth. *Sex, Skulls, and Citizens: Gender and Racial Science in Argentina (1860-1910)*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2020.
- Kulick, Don. *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes—Worlds of Desire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Kvitko, Luis Alberto. “La situación del médico frente al tratamiento hormonal de travestis y transexuales: Consideraciones jurídicas, medicolegales y deontológicas.” *La semana médica* 161, no. 10 (1982): 350–58.
- Ladra, Antonio, and N. N. Argañarás. *Gloria o el drama de la existencia: Recuerdos del travesti más viejo de América del Sur*. Montevideo: O dos, 1991.
- Larson, Carolyne, ed. *The Conquest of the Desert: Argentina’s Indigenous Peoples and the Battle for History*. 1st ed. Diálogos series. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020.

- Lazarte, Juan. "Curso de sexología." *Hombre de América* (1940): n4.
- "Lesiones cambio de sexo." *Revista de jurisprudencia* 8, no. 8 (1978): 600–608.
- Lehmann-Nitsche, Robert. *Textos eróticos del Río de la Plata: Ensayo lingüístico sobre textos sicalípticos*. Vol. 1. Librería Clásica, 1981.
- López Bolado, Jorge. *Los médicos y el Código Penal: Reponsabilidad penal, lesiones quirúrgicas y terapéuticas, eutanasia y eugenesia, abortos, cambio de sexo, trasplante de órganos, inseminación y fecundación artificial, uso de drogas prohibidas, certificados falsos, ejercicio ilegal de la medicina, abuso deshonesto, secreto profesional, inimputabilidad*. Buenos Aires: Universidad, 1981.
- Lozano, Ezequiel. "Tramas artísticas del exilio sexual, entre Brasil y Argentina." *Badebec* 6, no. 12 (2017): 168–179.
- Lugones, Benigno B. *Crónicas, folletines y otros escritos (1879-1884). Estudio preliminar de Diego Galeano*. Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, 2011.
- Luna, Felix. "El Desvancito: Homosexualidad y etimología." *Todo es historia*, no. 105 (1976): 36.
- Madero, Abel Sierra. "Sobre el cambio de sexo de transexuales en Cuba: Documentos inéditos." *Hypermedia Magazine*, April 2, 2021.
<https://www.hypermediamagazine.com/columnistas/fiebre-de-archivo/sobre-el-cambio-de-sexo-de-transexuales-en-cuba-documentos-ineditos/>.
- Maffía, Diana, Lohana Berkins, Mauro Cabral, Josefina Fernández-Guadaño, Amalia Fisher Pfaeffle, Eva Giberti, Flavio Rapisardi, and Patricia Soley-Beltran. *Sexualidades migrantes género y transgénero*. Buenos Aires: Feminaria Editora, 2003.
- Malva. *Mi recordatorio: Autobiografía de Malva*. Vidas. Argentina: Libros del Rojas, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2011.
- Manzano, Valeria. *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2014.
- Marchesi, Aldo. *Latin America's Radical Left: Rebellion and Cold War in the Global 1960s*. Vol. 107. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Martínez, Juliana. "Dressed like a Man? Of Language, Bodies, and Monsters in the Trial of Enrique/Enriqueta Favez and Its Contemporary Accounts." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 2 (2017): 188–206.
- Martínez, María Elena. "Archives, Bodies, and Imagination: The Case of Juana Aguilar and Queer Approaches to History, Sexuality, and Politics." *Radical History Review* 2014, no. 120 (2014): 159–182.
- Masotta, Carlos. "Cuerpos dóciles y miradas encontradas: Miniaturización de los cuerpos e indicios de la resistencia en postales de indios argentinas

- (1900-1940)." *Revista chilena de antropología visual* 3 (2003): 1–16.
- Masson, Laura. *La política en femenino: Género y poder en la Provincia de Buenos Aires*. 1st ed. Serie etnográfica. Buenos Aires: Centro de Antropología, Editorial Antropofagia, 2004.
- McGee, Sandra F. "The Visible and Invisible Liga Patriótica Argentina, 1919-28: Gender Roles and the Right Wing." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 64, no. 2 (1984): 233–258.
- Menstrual, Naty. *Continuadísimo*. 1st. ed. Ex libris. Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia Editora, 2008.
- Meyerowitz, Joanne J. *How Sex Changed*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Milanesio, Natalia. *Destape: Sex, Democracy, and Freedom in Postdictatorial Argentina*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019.
- Milanesio, Natalia. *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina: The Rise of Popular Consumer Culture*. Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2013.
- Miranda, Marisa. *Controlar lo incontrolable: Una historia de la sexualidad en la Argentina*. Historia Biblos. Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2011.
- Moguillanes, Inés. "La historia silenciada de Evelyn." *Soy*, January 27, 2023.
- Montes de Oca, Eva. *Guía negra de Buenos Aires: Marginación en la gran ciudad*. Colección Argentina Hoy. Buenos Aires: Temas de Hoy, 1995.
- "N 12360, C. Críminal Capítal—Ricardo, San Martín." *Revista de jurisprudencia* 7, no. 7 (1966): 473–500.
- Najmabadi, Afsaneh. *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Nash, Oliver. *Siempre estuve ahí*. Buenos Aires: AGUILAR, 2022.
- "No tengo la culpa de ser inteligente." *La Nación*. October 27, 1996.
<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/no-tengo-la-culpa-de-ser-inteligente-nid202494/>.
- Noy, Fernando. "DVD: Divina Valeria Divina." June 17, 2011.
<https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/soy/1-2013-2011-06-17.html>.
- Ochoa, Marcia. "La ciudadanía ingrata." *El lugar sin límites: Revista de estudios y políticas de género* 1, no. 2 (2019): 69–83.
- Ochoa, Marcia. *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Oddone, María Elena. "La transexualidad." *El informador público*, May 17, 1991 year 5, no. 242, Buenos Aires.
- Oliva, Alexis. "De clandestinidades y disidencias: Eugenio, varón trans e hijo de desaparecidxs." Agencia Presentes.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200323164839/>

<https://agenciapresentes.org/2020/03/22/de-clandestinidades-y-disidencias-eugenio-varon-trans-e-hijo-de-desaparecidxs/>.

- Orus, Manuel. "Hermafroditismo, intersexualidad y transexualismo." *Revista de jurisprudencia* VIII, no. 8 (1978): 500–520.
- Paschoal, Marcio. *Rogéria, uma mulher e mais um pouco*. Rio de Janeiro: Estação Brasil, 2016.
- Pellegrini, Rinaldo. *Sexuología*. Madrid: Morata, 1950.
- Peralta, Jorge Luis. *Paisajes de varones: Genealogías del homoerotismo en la literatura argentina*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2017.
- Peralta, Jorge Luis, and Patricio Simonetto. "Una lengua impropia: Hacia una historia del argot gay en Argentina (1880-2010)." In *Palabras para una tribu: Estudios sobre argot gay en Argentina, España y México*, edited by Jorge Luis Peralta and Rafael Mérida Jimenéz, 17-104. Madrid: Egales, 2020.
- Pérez, Inés. "Domestic Workers' Experiences of Motherhood in Mid-Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires." *Women's History Review* (2020): 1–15.
- Perlongher, Néstor, and Cecilia Palermo. *Correspondencia*. Campo Real 12. Buenos Aires: Mansalva, 2016.
- Perry, D., and J. D. Frame. "The History and Development of Breast Implants." *Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons of England* 102, no. 7 (September 2020): 478–482. <https://doi.org/10.1308/rcsann.2020.0003>.
- Pesce, Ruben. *La historia del tango, La guardia vieja*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1977.
- Petracci, Mónica, and Mario Pecheny. *Argentina, derechos humanos y sexualidad*. Buenos Aires: CEDES/CLAM, 2007.
- Plemons, Eric. *The Look of a Woman: Facial Feminization Surgery and the Aims of Trans-Medicine*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Prieur, Annick. *La Casa de la Mema: Travestis, locas y machos*. Mexico: Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género UNAM, 2014.
- Queiróz, Juan Pablo. "La historia de nuestra historia." Moléculas Malucas, August 19, 2021. <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/la-historia-de-nuestra-historia>.
- Queiróz, Juan Pablo. "Memorias del desvío." Moléculas Malucas. February 25, 2021. <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/memorias-del-desvío>.
- Quijada, Osvaldo, et al. *El cambio de sexo*. Buenos Aires: Sociedad Antropológica Médico-Legal de Chile, 1968.
- Radi, Blas. "El reloj político de los derechos sexuales y reproductivos." *Sociales en debate* 14 (2018): 1–5.
- Radi, Blas. "On Trans* Epistemology: Critiques, Contributions, and Challenges." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no 1, (2019): 43–63.

- Ramacciotti, Karina Inés, and Adriana María Valobra. "El campo médico argentino y su mirada al tribadismo, 1936-1955." *Revista estudios feministas* 16, no. 2 (2008): 493–516.
- Rapisardi, Flavio, and Alejandro Modarelli. *Fiestas, baños y exilios: Los gays porteños en la última dictadura*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2001.
- Rein, Raanan. "Challenging the Argentine Melting Pot: Peronism, Hispanidad, and Cultural Diversity." *Journal of Contemporary History* 57, no. 3 (2022). 00220094211065994.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, no. 4 (1980): 631–660.
- Rizki, Cole. "Latin/x American Trans Studies: Toward a Travesti-Trans Analytic." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (2019): 145–155.
- Rizki, Cole. "No State Apparatus Goes to Bed Genocidal Then Wakes Up Democratic" Fascist Ideology and Transgender Politics in Post-dictatorship Argentina." *Radical History Review* 2020, no. 138 (2020): 82–107.
- Roche, Carlos. "Pseudo hermafroditismo masculino o androginoide." Doctoral thesis, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1904.
- Rodriguez, Julia. *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Rojas, Nerio. "Hermafroditismo: Caso comentado." *Archivos de psiquiatría, criminología y ciencias afines* 23, no. 102 (1937): 199–201.
- Rouse, Wendy L. *Public Faces, Secret Lives: A Queer History of the Women's Suffrage Movement*. New York: New York University Press, 2022.
- Rueda, Alba. "Aportes del movimiento travesti-trans a las políticas decoloniales en América del Sur." In *Los mil y un pequeños sexos*, edited by Mariano Lopez Seoane, 91-104. Buenos Aires: UNTREF, 2016.
- Salessi, Jorge. *Médicos, maleantes y maricas: Higiene, criminología y homosexualidad en la construcción de la nación argentina (Buenos Aires 1871-1914)*. Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 1995.
- Sanabria, Emilia. *Plastic Bodies: Sex Hormones and Menstrual Suppression in Brazil*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Santoro, Estefania. "¿Por qué no se habla de los suicidios de varones trans?" *Revista Crisis*, 2023. <https://revistacitrica.com/por-que-no-se-habla-de-los-suicidios-de-varones-trans-.html>.
- Sanzol, Carlos. *HEMBRA. Cris Miró. Vivir y morir en un país de machos*. Buenos Aires: Milena Caserola, 2016.
- Scheinkman, Ludmila. "'¿Dónde están los machos?' Sindicalización anarquista, masculina y femenina, en la industria del dulce (Buenos Aires, 1920-1929)." *Archivos de historia del movimiento obrero y la izquierda*, no. 7 (2015): 15–35.

- Schettini, Cristiana. "Circuitos de trabalho no mercado de diversões sul americano no começo do século XX." *Cadernos AEL*, 2010.
- Schwartz, O. *Historia natural del hombre*. Buenos Aires: Claridad, 1930
- Scotch, Cinthia Di Carlo. "Deborah Singer." Wikitrans, Archivo de la Memoria Trans, 2020. <https://archivotrans.ar/index.php/wikitrans>.
- Segato, Rita. "La estructura de género y el mandato de violación." In *Mujeres intelectuales: Feminismo y liberación en América Latina y el Caribe*, edited by Alejandra de Santiago, Edith Caballero, and Gabriela González. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2017, 299–332.
- Semán, Ernesto. *Breve historia del antipopulismo: Los intentos por domesticar a la Argentina plebeya, de 1810 a Macri. Singular*. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2021.
- Show, Vanessa. *Es verdad Vanessa Show*. Buenos Aires: Escriba, 2012.
- Sigal, Silvia. *La Plaza de Mayo: Una crónica*. 1st ed. Metamorfosis. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2006.
- Simonetto, Patricio. "'The Club of the Four Hs': HIV/AIDS, Race, and Neoliberalism in Argentina." *Nursing Clio*, May 4, 2021. <https://nursingclio.org/2021/05/04/the-club-of-the-four-hs-hiv-aids-race-and-neoliberalism-in-argentina/>.
- Simonetto, Patricio. *El dinero no es todo: Compra y venta de sexo en la Argentina del siglo XX*. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2019.
- Simonetto, Patricio. "Intimididades disidentes: Intersecciones en las experiencias de homosexuales y lesbianas en Buenos Aires durante los sesenta y setenta." *Trashumante: Revista americana de historia social*, no. 11 (2018): 28–50.
- Simonetto, Patricio. "La moral institucionalizada: Reflexiones sobre el Estado, las sexualidades y la violencia en la Argentina del siglo XX." *e-l@tina: Revista electrónica de estudios latinoamericanos* 14, no. 55 (2016): 1–22.
- Simonetto, Patricio. "Movimientos de liberación homosexual en América Latina: Aportes historiográficos desde una perspectiva comparada entre Argentina, Brasil, Chile, Colombia y México (1967-1982)." *Iberoamericana* 17, no. 65 (2017): 157–177.
- Simonetto, Patricio, and Marce Butierrez. "The Archival Riot: Travesti/Trans* Audiovisual Memory Politics in Twenty-First-Century Argentina." *Memory Studies* 16, Issue 2 (2022): 1–16.
- Simonetto, Patricio, and Johana Kunin. "Mariela Muñoz: Citizenship, Motherhood, and Transsexual Politics in Argentina (1943–2017)." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (2021): 516–531.
- Skidmore, Emily. *True Sex: The Lives of Trans Men at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. New York: NYU Press, 2017.

- “Sociedad & Cultura.” *El teje*. Accessed June 25, 2021.
<https://elteje.com/sociedad-cultura/la-vieja-vanesa>.
- Soiza Reilly, Juan José de, “Ladrones vestidos de mujer.” *Fray Mocho*, no. 5 (1912): 67–72.
- Soliva, Thiago Barcelos. “Sobre o talento de ser fabulosa: Os ‘shows de travesti’ e a invenção da “travesti profissional.” *Cadernos Pagu*, no. 53 (2018).
- Sosa Villada, Camila. *Bad Girls*. Translated by Kit Maude. New York: Other Press, 2022.
- Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History*. New York: Seal Press, 2008.
- Stryker, Susan, and Stephen Whittle. *Transgender Studies Reader*. Vol. 1. London: Taylor & Francis, 2006.
- Sutton, Barbara. *Surviving State Terror: Women’s Testimonies of Repression and Resistance in Argentina*. New York: New York University Press, 2018.
- Tabbush, Constanza, María Constanza Díaz, Catalina Trebisacce, and Victoria Keller. “Matrimonio igualitario, identidad de género y disputas por el derecho al aborto en Argentina: La política sexual durante el kirchnerismo (2003-2015).” *Sexualidad, salud y sociedad (Rio de Janeiro)*, no. 22 (April 2016): 22–55. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-6487.sess.2016.22.02.a>.
- Taylor, Diana. “Disappearing Acts.” In *Disappearing Acts*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- TÉLAM. “Detienen a un falso cirujano mientras realizaba una intervención en un consultorio clandestino.” January 7, 2022.
<https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/202201/580258-detiene-a-un-falso-cirujano-mientras-realizaba-una-intervencion-en-un-consultorio-clandestino.html>.
- Teran Lomas, Roberto. “La extirpación de organos sexuales en el derecho penal.” *Revista de jurisprudencia* 8, no. 7 (1966): 700–724.
- Reuters. “Timeline: A Short History of Breast Implants.” June 26, 2012, sec. Healthcare & Pharma. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-implants-pip-idUSTRE80P12V20120126>.
- Thomas, Lynn M. *Beneath the Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.
- Tintilay, Ivana. “Memorias de una cuarentena eterna.” Moléculas Malucas. May 9, 2020. <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/memorias-de-una-cuarentena-eterna>
- Tintilay, Ivana. “Yo nací, soy y moriré orgullosamente puta.” Moléculas Malucas. December 10, 2021. <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/yo-naci-soy-y-morire-orgullosamente-puta>.
- “Todes, es con DNI.” LatFem November 20, 2020, <https://latfem.org/todes-es-con-dni/>.

- Tossounian, Cecilia. *La Joven Moderna in Interwar Argentina: Gender, Nation, and Popular Culture*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020.
- Valentine, David. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Valobra, Adriana. "Feminismo, sufragismo y mujeres en los partidos políticos en la Argentina de la primera mitad del siglo XX." *Amnis: Revue d'études des sociétés et cultures contemporaines Europe/Amérique*, no. 8 (2008): 10–28.
- Vaughan, Mary Kay, Gabriela Cano, and Jocelyn H. Olcott. *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Veras, Elias Ferreira. *Travestis: Carne, tinta e papel*. Brazil: Editora Appris, 2020.
- Veyga, Francisco de. "La inversión sexual adquirida. Tipo de invertido profesional. Tipo de invertido por sugestión. Tipo de invertido por causa de decaimiento mental." *Archivos de psiquiatría, criminología y ciencias afines* 2 (1903): 193–200.
- Veyga, Francisco de. "La inversión sexual adquirida. Tipo profesional: Un invertido comerciante." *Archivos de Psiquiatría, criminología y ciencias afines* 2 (1903): 492–496.
- Veyga, Francisco de. "Invertido sexual imitando a mujer honesta." *Archivo de criminología y medicina legal y psiquiatría* 1 (1902): 368–380.
- Vidal-Ortiz, Salvador, "Transgender and Transsexual Studies: Sociology's Influence and Future Steps," *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 2 (2008): 433–450.
- Vidal-Ortiz, Salvador, and Patricio Simonetto. "Lohana Berkins: Apuntes sobre la teoría encarnada travesti Latinoamericana," in *Política, deliberação pública e organizações sociais na contemporaneidade*, edited by Antônio Carlos Sardinha, Delamar José Volpato Dutra, and Dilnéia Rochana Tavares do Couto, 20–42. Macapá: UNIFAP, 2021.
- Vider, Stephen. *The Queerness of Home: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Domesticity after World War II*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021.
- Viladrich, Anahí. "Neither Virgins nor Whores: Tango Lyrics and Gender Representations in the Tango World." *Journal of Popular Culture* 39, no. 2 (2006): 272–293.
- Vizgarra, Daniela. "Tacos en las tablas." *El teje* 5 (2009): 18.
- Wayar, Marlene. *Diccionario travesti de la T a la T*. Buenos Aires: Página 12, 2020.
- Wayar, Marlene. *Furia travesti: Diccionario de la T a la T*. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2021.
- Wayar, Marlene. *Travesti: Una teoría lo suficientemente buena*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Muchas Nueces, 2018.

- Wonder, Claudia. *Olhares de Claudia Wonder: Crônicas e outras histórias*. São Paulo, SP: Edições GLS, 2008.
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health, *Normas de atención para la salud de personas trans y con variabilidad de género*. USA: WPATH, 2020.
- Yarfitz, Mir. *Impure Migration: Jews and Sex Work in Golden Age Argentina*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2019.
- Yarfitz, Mir. “La Bella Otero’s Overdetermined Anality: Tales of Sexual Inversion in Early Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires.” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, no. 70 (2023), forthcoming.
- Yarfitz, Mir. “Tragic Inverts or Bold Women-Men? Popular vs. Expert Responses to Crossdressing and Gender Bending in Early Twentieth-Century Argentina.” Paper presented in the Latin American Studies Association Conference, Barcelona, 2019.
- Yarfitz, Mir, and Marce Butierrez. “Trans and Travesti Identities in Twentieth-Century South America.” *Latin American History Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, forthcoming.
- Yogyakarta Principles: The Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. March 2007. Yogyakarta: Yogyakarta Principles.

Index

NOTE: Page numbers in *italic* type refer to figures.

- abortion, [203](#), [208](#)
- activism. *See* lesbian and gay movements; LGBTTTIQ+ movement; protest(s); transsexual politics; travesti/trans activism
- Aida, [54–55](#)
- Alfonsín, Raúl, [145](#), [181–182](#)
- Alvarez, Gabriela, [149](#)
- Ana, [125](#)
- Anti Communist Alliance (AAA), [123](#)
- Arash, [81](#)
- archival practices, [52](#), [75](#), [218](#)
- archival research, [10–11](#), [12–13](#)
- archives, [4](#), [12](#), [75–76](#), [188–190](#), [222](#)
- Archivo de la Memoria Trans, [4](#), [12](#), [222](#)
- Archivos Desviados, [12](#)
- Argentine Homosexual Community (CHA), [146](#), [181](#)
- artistic performances, [36–38](#)
 - See also* *travestis artistas*
- Asociación de Travestis Argentinas (ATA), [149](#), [195–196](#)
- authenticity/realness, [106](#), [113](#), [123–125](#)
- autopsies, [49](#), [217](#)

- Bad Girls* (Sosa Villada), [1–2](#)
- Baigorria, Jorge Ricardo, [87–89](#)
- Barea, Batato, [154](#)
- Baudracco, Claudia Pía, [195](#)
- beauty, [80](#), [118](#), [124–125](#), [144](#), [173–174](#)
 - racialized, [116–117](#), [149–150](#)
- Bejarano, Adelina, [53](#)
- Belbey, José, [70–78](#), [85–86](#)
- belonging, [128–129](#), [132](#), [179](#), [220](#)
- Bembo, Marcos, [57](#)
- Benjamin, Harry, [162–163](#)
- Benjamin Syndrome, [162](#)

See also “wrong body” discourse

Berkins, Lohana

- activism, [213](#)
- background, [130](#)
- and Carnival, [128](#), [134](#), [135](#)
- and feminism, [172–173](#)
- on Latin American context, [19](#)
- on law, [18](#), [180](#), [211](#), [215–216](#)
- silicone breasts, [134](#), [136](#)
- on travesti identity, [171–173](#)

bodies

- archival dimension, [9–10](#)
- as laboratories, [9–10](#), [216–218](#)
- and nation, [2](#)
- politicization of, [136](#), [178](#), [191–192](#), [193–194](#), [195](#), [197](#)
- politicization of transsexual, [197–207](#)
- See also* “wrong body” discourse

body protest, [136](#), [178](#), [192](#), [193–194](#), [195](#), [197](#)

Boys Don’t Cry (film), [166](#)

Brazil, [110](#), [113–114](#), [115–116](#), [117–118](#)

breast augmentation

- alternative substances, [133–134](#), [151–152](#), [156](#)
- and police violence, [9](#), [180](#)
- silicone, [138](#), [139](#), [150–152](#), [153–154](#), [155–158](#)

breast exposure

- and politicization, [136](#), [178](#), [190](#), [191](#), [192](#), [193–194](#), [195](#), [197](#)
- and popular culture, [112](#), [113](#), [134](#), [135](#), [142](#), [143](#)

breast implants, [152](#), [154](#)

Brown, Jessica, [118](#)

bufa/o, [55](#)

buttocks, [144](#), [156](#), [158](#)

Caballeros de la Noche, Los, [132–133](#)

Campora, Héctor José, [109](#)

Caras y caretas (magazine), [22](#), [23](#), [24](#)

Caride, Pedro, [43](#), [44](#), [45](#), [49](#)

Carnival, [127–136](#)

Carolina, [153](#)

carrilche language, [72](#)

Castillo, José, [38–39](#)

CHA (Argentine Homosexual Community), [146](#), [181](#)

Chauncey, George, 27, 28
Chiche, 125
chongos (heterosexual male lovers), 55, 185
citizenship, 2, 16–18, 41, 90–91
 and belonging, 128, 179, 220
 and trans men, 45–52
civil violence, 61–62, 141, 184–187, 214
class. *See* social class
clothing
 at Carnival, 130–132
 and female embodiment, 55–57, 61, 78, 79, 148, 149
 legal restrictions, 62, 95, 131–132, 183
 and male embodiment, 86, 87
Coccinelle, 82–84, 118
cocotos, 57–58
Comunidad Homosexual Argentina, (CHA), 146, 181
Correa, María Belén, 149, 150, 195
cotton, 80, 150
court cases
 legal recognition, 94–95, 101–102, 160, 198, 204–205
 medical prosecutions, 95, 97, 100–101
Cowell, Roberta, 81
crime
 and sexual inversion, 36, 58, 61
 See also legal restrictions; police and policing
criminal photography, 13–14, 75–76, 188–191
Cuba, 163

decriminalization, 182
Defazio, Francisco, 65, 84, 94, 95, 96–97
descamisados, 194
de Veyga, Francisco, 30–31, 35, 54, 59, 234n26
Disalvo, Lucas, 81
doctors. *See* medical professionals
documentary research, 10–11, 12–13, 75
documents
 forgery, 48, 89, 99, 202
 and invisibility, 74
 and legal recognition, 51, 90–91, 99, 101–102

Elizabeth, 173

Elyzabeth, 148
embodiment. *See* gender embodiment techniques
Emma, 174
employment. *See* work/employment
empowerment/agency
 of travestis, 142–143, 144
 See also travesti/trans activism
entertainment. *See* Carnival; films; plays; television; *transformismo*; *travestis artistas*
Eroticón (magazine), 141, 142–143
Espil, Catalina, 40–41, 42–43
Evelyn (Jorge Pérez), 114, 122, 125
exile, 117, 122, 123, 126, 180, 181, 201, 248n62

Fabiola, 192
facial surgery, 158–159
fairies, 27, 28
families
 rejection by, 130, 153, 168, 184, 185, 249n87
 support from, 158, 162, 184
 travesti, 130
 violence in, 184
 See also marriage
fantasizing, 147
Faussonne, César, 22, 23, 32, 34
female embodiment
 and beauty, 80, 124–125, 149–150
 and Carnival, 129–130, 133–134
 early twentieth century, 54–62
 late twentieth-century biotechnology, 150–160
 late twentieth-century context, 144–146
 late twentieth-century examples, 141–144, 146–148
 mid-twentieth-century medical, 81–85
 mid-twentieth-century nonmedical, 69–81
 and *travestis artistas*, 112–113, 124–125
female embodiment techniques
 clothing, 55–57, 61, 78, 79, 148, 149
 facial surgery, 158–159
 fantasizing, 147
 genital surgery, 65, 81–85, 159–160
 hair removal, 80

hormones, 113, 150, 152–153
makeup, 148
naming, 147
oil injections, 133–134, 156
racialized, 149–150
silicone, 138, 139, 150–152, 153–154, 155–158, 170
femininity, invertidos' expression of, 58–59
feminism, 46, 172–173, 200–201, 203–204
Fernanda, María, 94–95
films, 121, 166, 183
forged documents, 48, 89, 99, 202
France, influence of, 82–84, 118
freedom of movement
 clothing and legal restrictions, 62, 183
 fear of violence, 186–187
 See also migration
Fregoli, Leopoldo, 36, 37
friendship. *See* sociability
Frondizi, Arturo, 109

Gabriela, 157
Galeano, Javier, 13–14
Gallaci, Jackeline, 81
gay and lesbian movements, 181, 194–195, 196, 198, 203–204
 See also LGBTTTIQ+ movement
gay history, 27–28
gender dysphoria, 166
gender embodiment techniques, 139–141
 activist challenges to, 170–171
 self-experimentation, 219–220
 temporalities of, 220
 See also female embodiment techniques; male embodiment techniques
Gender Identity Law (2012), 8, 18, 170, 209–211, 215–216
gender impersonation (*transformismo*), 36–38, 114, 119
gender transgression (early twentieth century), 26–31
 artistic performances, 36–39
 hypervisibilization and regulation, 62
 languages of, 26–27, 31–39
 man-woman example, 22, 23–25
genital surgery, 65, 81–85, 159–160
Gill-Peterson, Jules, 17

Girls, Les, 110–115, 116

global context. *See* transnational context

Gloria, 95

Grinspan, Mauro Cabral, 171, 208

Guido, José María, 129

hair

body hair, 80, 184

cutting, 77–78, 183–184

and female embodiment, 148, 149

and male embodiment, 86, 88

Halberstam, Jack, 151

hate crime, 214

healthcare

limitations of, 168, 214–215

and travesti/trans activism, 174

See also medical interventions

health risks

of hormonal treatment, 152–153

of silicone, 9, 139, 151, 152, 155, 156, 157, 158, 170

of surgery, 160, 167–168

hermaphrodites, 41, 43, 44, 84, 89, 95

Hernández, Horacio Reyes, 89–93

heterosexual male lovers. *See* *chongos*

HIV/AIDS, 154–155

hombre-mujer (man-woman), 22, 23, 24, 34–35

hormonal treatments, 97

and activism, 170–171

and female embodiment, 113, 150, 152–153

and male embodiment, 139, 162, 163, 167

human rights

and protest, 145, 161–162, 181, 222

and trans politics, 165–166, 201

violations, 181, 221

Yogyakarta Principles, 209

Iguanas, Las (magazine), 166, 204

Illia, Arturo, 96, 129

inclusion. *See* belonging

Indigenous people, 22, 23–25, 32–33, 34–35

Ingenieros, José, 35

internet, 167

interpersonal relationships
 chongos, 55, 185
 and male embodiment, 48, 89, 91–92
 marriage, 48, 54–55, 78–79, 85
 violence in, 185
 See also families; sociability

intersexuality, 41–42, 43, 44–46, 84, 89–90, 95

interviews, 11–12

invertidos, *Los* (Castillo), 38–39

invertidos sexuales. *See* sexual inversion

Isidoro's Follies (magazine), 104, 105, 106

Juan, 43, 44–46

Kalym, 168–170

knowledge production/sharing, 133, 140, 141, 147, 155–156, 164–165

Krafft-Ebing, Richard Von, 240n23

Kulick, Don, 144

La Beba Irresistible, 132

La Bella Otero, 58–59, 61–62

labor movement, 193–194

language, 39, 61, 72
 See also terminology

La Ñoño, 138, 139

Lanusse, Alejandro Agustín, 109, 111

La Princesa de Borbón, 58

La Trachyn, Julieta, 221

Laure, Jorge, 40–41, 42

La Vieja Vanesa, 121–122, 128–129, 133–134

legal change, 169, 205–206
 employment law, 213–214, 215
 Gender Identity Law (2012), 8, 18, 170, 209–211, 215–216
 and lived experience, 214–216

legal recognition
 court cases, 94–95, 101–102, 160, 198, 204–205
 documents, 51, 90–91, 99, 101–102
 Gender Identity Law (2012), 8, 18, 170, 209–211, 215–216

legal restrictions, 7–8
 on clothing/appearance, 62, 95, 131–132, 183

and public morality, 182–183
on sex change surgery, 8, 67, 95, 96, 100–101, 155
Lehmann-Nitsche, Robert, 39
lesbian and gay movements, 181, 194–195, 196, 198, 203–204
LGBTTTIQ+ movement, 4, 165–166, 169
Liga Patriótica (Patriotic League), 78, 241 n46
“living machines,” 9, 140
locuras de Isidoro, Las (magazine), 104, 105, 106
Lopez, Ana, 160
Lourdes, 132–133
Luly, 158
Lunfardo language, 39, 61

machito, La (Adelina Bejarano), 52–53
Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 145, 161–162, 209, 222
magazines. *See* newspapers/magazines
Maizani, Azucena, 38
makeup, 148
Malas, Las (Sosa Villada), 1–2
male citizenship, 46–52, 90–91
male embodiment
 early twentieth century, 43–53, 216–218
 and interpersonal relationships, 89, 91–92
 late twentieth century onwards, 161–170
 and legal documents, 90–91
 mid-twentieth century, 85–93
 and political practice, 169–170
 and social class, 52–53, 86–89, 92
 and violence, 89, 91
male embodiment techniques, 160–161, 166–167
 clothing, 86, 87
 hormonal treatment, 139, 162, 163, 167
 and internet, 167
 prostheses, 91
 surgery, 44, 45, 163, 167–168
Malva, 78–79, 117, 129, 131
man-woman (*hombre-mujer*), 22, 23, 24, 34–35
Marcela, 148
Marcela “La Rompe Coches,” 190
Margaride, Luis, 95–96
maricas, 5, 26, 27–30, 78–79, 188

Maricones, Los (film), 183
maridaje, 78–79
Marina, 70, 71, 72–78, 80–81
Marissa, 159–160
marriage, 48, 54–55, 78–79, 85, 91
Marta, 98–99
Martinez, Elena, 13
Mary (from Entre Ríos), 186
Mary (from Salta), 146–148
masculinity, 92
Mayka, 120–121
media. *See* newspapers/magazines; television
medical approaches
 early twentieth century, 40–45
 of gender transgression, 31–32, 34–35
 of intersexuality, 41–42
 medical concepts/discourses
 mid/late twentieth century, 93–102, 162–163
 role in state building, 32
 of sex, 31–32, 65–66, 69, 99–100, 217–218
medical interventions
 regulation of, 8, 67, 68, 95, 96, 97, 100–101, 155
 and social class, 99
 See also autopsies; healthcare; surgery
medical photography, 13–14, 22, 23, 24, 34–35, 75–77
medical professionals
 prosecution of, 95, 97, 100–101
 reluctance to treat travestis, 154
medical supervision of treatments, 152, 153
memory politics, 4, 222
Menem, Carlos Saúl, 145, 154–155, 182
methodological challenges, 9–14, 27, 75–77, 223–224
migration, 8
 and Carnival, 127
 examples, 78, 90, 153, 160
 and gender recognition, 53
 networks, 125–126
 and racialization, 134
 and travesti families, 130
 See also exile
military, and prostitution, 74

military leaders, prosecution of, 181
Mi novia el travesti (film), 121
Miró, Cris, 206–207
mobility, 8, 107, 148
 and *siliconeras*, 155–156
 and theatrical shows, 111, 114–115, 117
 See also exile; freedom of movement; migration
Money, John, 162–163
Monica, 184–185
morality. *See* public morality
Moreno, Yanina, 200
morocha Argentina, 116–117, 135, 149–150
motherhood, 202–204
 See also reproductive capacity
Muñoz, Mariela, 201–204
murders, 184, 185–186, 192, 214

names
 changing, 43, 101–102
 and female embodiment, 147
 See also legal recognition
nation
 and body, 2
 class discourses, 33–34
 gender discourses, 164
 and morality, 96
 racial discourses, 32–33, 34, 134–135, 154–155
 and reproductive capacity, 2, 41, 68, 90–91, 95, 100–101
 sex change as threat to, 67
 and state intervention, 62, 219
 See also white Argentine identity
natural body. *See* authenticity/realness
neoliberalism, 145, 182
newspapers/magazines
 activist, 166, 199, 204
 and civil violence, 184, 186
 and gender transgression, 35–36, 49–50, 91, 92–93
 and gender transition, 81, 83, 84–85
 and HIV/AIDS, 154
 images of travestis in prison, 190–191
 and racial discourses, 116

- and sex change debate, 96, 97–99
- and sex change treatments, 155
- and trans men, 49–50, 91, 92–93, 162, 166
- and travesti politics, 141, 142–143, 144, 177
- travestis in popular culture, 104, 105, 106, 110, 114, 115, 116

nose modification, 149

nudity, 142, 143, 144

See also breast exposure

Oddone, Maria, 201

oil injections, 133–134, 156

Onganía, Juan Carlos, 96, 109, 129

Ortiz, Susy, 50

Pan-American Highway, 141, 186

parties, 57–58, 61, 79

Patti, Luis, 207

Pedro, 85–87

Peralta, María Luisa, 203–204

Pérez, Jorge (Evelyn), 114, 122, 125

Perlongher, Néstor, 117

Perón, Isabel Martinez de, 109

Perón, Juan Domingo, 109

Peronism, 66

photographs

- and body classification, 34–35, 188
- medical, 13–14, 22, 23, 24, 34–35, 75–77
- and methodology, 12–14, 75–77
- nude, 142, 143
- personal archives, 50, 79
- portraits, 50–52, 55–57
- prison, 13–14, 75–76, 188–191
- use to affirm gender belonging, 50–52

Pietro, PJ, 144

piu piu (mattresses), 150

plays, 38–39

police and policing

- and Carnival, 128, 129
- continued use of power, 187
- of gender transgression, 23, 62, 219
- media reports, 36

of prostitution, 73
protest against, 197
of sex change treatments, 155
of sexuality, 108, 109, 182
travesti negotiation with, 190
and *travestis artistas*, 111, 122–123
police violence, 9, 123, 164, 180, 183–184, 197
political alliances, 196–197
political context, 66, 96, 108–109, 144–146, 161–162, 169, 180–182, 223
political violence, 4, 123, 161, 221–222
politicization of bodies. *See* bodies
popular culture
 Carnival, 127–136
 changing interests of 1970s, 122
 sexualization of 1980s, 145–146
 transnational influences, 110–118
 travesti authenticity, 123–125
 See also films; newspapers/magazines; plays; television; *travestis artistas*
portraits, 50–52, 55–57
press. *See* newspapers/magazines
pride demonstrations, 196, 197, 200
prison and imprisonment, 59, 73, 95, 164–165, 180, 188–191
 photographs, 13–14, 75–76, 188–191
prostheses, 91, 139, 150
prostitution. *See* sex work/prostitution
protest(s)
 and human rights, 145, 161–162, 181, 222
 by transsexuals, 198, 199
 by travestis, 176, 177, 178, 180–181, 192–194, 195, 197
protest cultures, 193–194
psychological discourse, 200–201
 See also “wrong body” discourse
public morality, 62, 96, 108, 109, 182–183

racial discourses
 and body politicization, 134–135, 194
 and sexuality, 115–116, 134–135
 and state building, 32–33, 34–35
 white Argentine identity, 33–34, 115–116, 149–150, 154–155
racialized body transformations, 149–150
Radi, Blas, 208

rape, 164, 184
registration of birth, 43
regulation. *See* legal restrictions; police and policing
reproductive capacity, and nation, 2, 41, 68, 90–91, 95, 100–101
reproductive justice, 208
research methodologies, 9–14
 challenges, 9–14, 27, 75–77, 223–224
respectability politics, 197–199, 201–203
rights (trans/travesti), 144, 199, 201
 and lived experience, 214–216
 See also human rights
Robles, Mary, 133
Roche, Carlos, 40
Rogéria, 115, 118
Rojas, Nerio, 50, 90–91, 244n106
Rosita, 184
Rouse, Wendy, 197–198
Rueda, Alba, 215

Sacayán, Diana, 213–214
Salta, 128, 130–132, 146–147, 148
Segato, Rita, 164
sex
 binary concept, 31–32, 41, 210–211
 legal and medical concepts, 99–100
 medical power and classification of, 43, 49
 multifactorial concept, 7, 32, 65–66, 69–70, 90, 99–100
 multiple concepts, 45, 218–219
sex change
 concept, 6–7, 228n22
 mid-twentieth century debate, 67, 69–70, 93–102
 politicization of (*see* transsexual politics)
sexual assault/rape, 164, 184
sexual desire/practices, 27–29, 59, 74, 89, 91–92, 142
sexual inversion (*invertidos sexuales*)
 and crime, 36, 58, 61
 hypervisibilization of, 54–62
 legal restrictions, 62
 use of term, 5, 30, 228n19
sexuality
 policing of, 108, 109, 182

- and racial discourses, 115–116, 134–135
- sexualization, of public life, 145–146, 178, 181
- sex work/prostitution
 - and breast augmentation, 151–152, 153
 - early twentieth century, 57–58, 59, 61
 - and HIV/AIDS, 155
 - mid-twentieth century, 73–74
 - and migration, 118, 125–126
 - Pan-American Highway, 141, 186
 - regulation of, 73, 74
 - and silicone injections, 158
 - and *travestis artistas*, 119, 120–121
 - and violence, 184, 185–186
- Show, Vanessa, 119–120, 123, 124, 126
- silicone breast implants, 152, 154
- silicone injections, 138, 139, 150–152, 153–154, 155–158
 - health risks, 9, 139, 151, 152, 155, 156, 157, 158, 170
- siliconeras*, 139, 155–156, 157, 158
- Singer, Deborah, 141–143, 144
- Skidmore, Emily, 45
- sociability, 73, 147, 149
- social class
 - and gender embodiment, 52–53, 68, 73, 86–89, 92, 98–99
 - and Peronism, 66
 - and protest culture, 193–194
 - and state building, 33–34
- social movements, 3–4, 182, 207
 - See also* labor movement; lesbian and gay movements; travesti/trans activism
- Solís, Malva, 78–79, 117, 129, 131
- Sosa Villada, Camila, 1–2
- state building. *See* nation
- state repression, 78, 108–109, 122–123
 - See also* legal restrictions; police and policing; prison and imprisonment
- state violence, 4, 221–222
 - See also* police violence; political violence
- Suárez, Raúl Luis, 46–52, 216–218
- surgery
 - early medical interventions, 41, 89
 - female-to-male transition, 44, 45, 163, 167–168
 - health risks, 160, 167–168

legal restriction, 67, 95, 96, 100–101, 155
male-to-female transition, 65, 81–85, 159–160
mid-twentieth century interventions, 65, 81–85
trans views of, 159–160

tango, 37–38
television, 206–207
temporalities, 19, 150–151, 220
Teresita, La, 57
terminology, 4–5, 26–27, 70–72, 162–163, 166
 See also language
Thelma, Linda, 38
Tintilay, Ivana, 185, 186–187, 190
trans, use of term, 4–5
Transexuales por el Derecho a la Vida y a la Identidad (TRANSDEVI), 195, 199
transformismo, 36–38, 114, 119
transhermeneutics, 189
trans lives, continued precarity of, 3, 214–215
Trans Memory Archive (Archivo de la Memoria Trans), 4, 12, 222
trans men
 embodiment techniques (*see* male embodiment techniques)
 Kalym, 168–170
 late twentieth century discourses, 166
 La machito, 52–53
 media coverage, 49–50, 91, 92–93, 162, 166
 medical discourses, 162–163
 political practice, 169–170, 204, 207–208
 and state violence, 164–165
 Raúl Luis Suárez, 46–52, 216–218
 Eugenio Talbot Wright, 161–166
trans movements. *See* travesti/trans activism
transnational context, 8, 107
 influence of Brazil, 110–118
 influence of France, 82–84, 118
 Les Girls, 110–115, 116
 political background, 108–109
trans rights, 199, 201
 and lived experience, 214–216
trans scholarship, 14–16
transsexuality, Coccinelle's impact, 82–84, 118
transsexual politics, 178–179

- activists/movements, 3–4, 198–200, 204
- courts and parliament, 204–206
- media, 206–207
- motherhood, 201–204
- respectability, 197–199, 201–203
- rights discourse, 199, 201
- trans men, 204
- travesti/trans distinction, 198, 200
- “wrong body” discourse, 198, 200–201
- transsexuals
 - distinct from travestis, 143, 178–179, 198, 200
 - and genital surgery, 159–160
 - use of term, 5
- trans terminology, 4–5
- trans women. *See* female embodiment; travestis
- travesti families, 130
- travestis
 - authenticity, 123–125
 - and Carnival, 127–136
 - distinct from transsexuals, 143, 178–179, 198, 200
 - embodiment techniques (*see* female embodiment techniques)
 - in press (*see* newspapers/magazines)
 - social distinctions between, 119, 120–121, 122–125
 - transnational influences, 110–118
 - use of term, 5, 70–71, 227n1
- travestis artistas*, 106
 - local performers, 119–123
 - natural beauty, 124–125
 - and social distinctions, 119, 120–121, 122–125
 - transnational, 110–117
- travestismo*, 72
- travestissement*, 70, 72
- travesti theory, 19
- travesti/trans activism, 148, 178–179
 - alternative models of identification, 171–174
 - converging agendas, 207–211
 - differences between, 198
 - and embodiment technologies, 170–171
 - and employment law, 213–214
 - growth of organizations, 195–196, 207–208
 - political alliances, 196–197

political context of 1980s/90s, 180–182
travesti body protest, 136, 178, 192, 193–194, 195, 197
travesti protests of 1980s/90s, 176, 177, 180–181, 188, 192–194, 195, 197
See also transsexual politics
trucaje, 19, 133, 141, 150

Urbina, Karina Dora, 198–201

Valeria, Divina, 111, 112, 113, 115
Vanesa (la fea), 157
vedette-men, 121–122
Vega, Liliana, 65, 84–85
Victor, Norman, 87
Vides, Stephen, 130

violence
civil violence, 61–62, 141, 184–187, 214
early twentieth-century *invertidos*, 61–62
in families, 184
hair cutting, 77–78, 183–184
historical violence, 13–14, 75
in literature, 1–2
and male embodiment, 89, 91
on Pan-American Highway, 141, 186
police violence, 9, 123, 164, 180, 183–184, 197
political violence, 4, 123, 161, 221–222
rape and sexual assault, 164, 184
as technology of embodiment, 180–188

visual artifacts, 12–14

Wayar, Marlene, 4, 147
wedding parties, 78–79
white Argentine identity, 33–34, 115–116, 149–150, 154–155
women's rights, 46, 50
See also feminism

work/employment
of children, 72–73
legislation, 213–214, 215
and male embodiment, 53, 86–87
Marina, 72–74
See also sex work/prostitution; *travestis artistas*

working class, 33–34, 66, 86–89, 193–194

Wright, Eugenio Talbot, [161–166](#)

“wrong body” discourse

medical, [162](#), [163](#), [166](#)

self-identification, [65](#), [81–82](#), [84–85](#), [88](#), [98](#)

in transsexual politics, [198](#), [200–201](#)

Yarfitz, Mir, [27–28](#)

Yogyakarta Principles, [209](#)

Zanchi, Alfredo, [85–86](#)